

The Virgin Mary, Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption

From the Church Fathers to Chiara Lubich

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This article discusses a series of texts on the Virgin Mary that are to be found among the writings by Chiara Lubich known as “Paradise ’49,” which describe the mystical illuminations that she, together with some of her first companions, experienced between 1949 and 1951. I begin by considering illuminations on Mary’s role as Theotokos, the Mother or Bearer of God, and then discuss the part she plays in the Redemption as the Desolata, or Desolate One. I conclude with some remarks about Lubich’s vision of Mary in relation to the Trinity, humanity, and creation (of which Mary is the highest synthesis). I show how Lubich partakes entirely in the tradition that begins with church fathers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, who write of the Virgin as the New Eve in the third century. Yet, I argue, Lubich’s insights add something new, particularly with regard to her understanding of the relationship between Jesus’s cry of forsakenness on the cross and Mary’s

desolation as she participates in the agony of her Son and assents to the loss of her divine motherhood. I seek to show that Lubich’s new understanding of these events has profound implications for a variety of doctrinal matters concerning Mary, including her freedom from sin, her co-operation in the Redemption, and her role in actualizing the grace unleashed by Christ’s sacrifice. But more important than this in some respects, Lubich shows us how it is through losing God out of love for God that Mary, in her desolation, most fully mirrors the kenosis that lies at the heart of the perichoretic relations of the Trinity and offers us a model of how we may live Trinitarian love on earth and participate as cocreators in the renewal and transformation of Creation.¹

Among the considerable body of writings by Chiara Lubich known as “Paradise ’49,” which describe the mystical illuminations she experienced between 1949 and 1951, shortly after the birth of the Focolare Movement, are a series of passages on Mary. In this paper, I discuss a selection of these passages in light of some fundamental texts of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians. Anyone familiar with the enormously rich Marian heritage of the patristic and medieval periods who reads Lubich’s ’49 writings about Mary will, in some respects, find themselves on familiar ground. This is true not only with regard to the fundamental theological categories within which she operates, which are profoundly rooted in the tradition, but also because the language is strongly reminiscent of the imagery the church fathers employed to extol Mary’s beauty and virtue and to explain her role in the economy of salvation. Nevertheless, it would be an error to think that Lubich’s writings simply reconnect with an

1. An earlier version of this paper appeared in 哲學與文化 40, no. 10 (2013/10): 71–101.

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ancient tradition that had been obscured by the sometimes excessive Marian pietism that arose in medieval Europe. At the heart of Paradise '49 is a profound paradigm shift in our understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, which necessarily involves Mary. That paradigm shift involves understanding everything from the viewpoint of the Trinitarian logic of unity (“May they all be one,” Jn 17:21) and Jesus Forsaken (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Mt 27:46), who (re)generates unity in creation, returning it to its original telos, which is to participate “in the ever-new and unending dynamism of the Trinitarian relationships.”²

First, a few words by way of introduction to Paradise '49 are in order, since it is important to understand that the experience itself, and not just the content of the illuminations, diverged from the established pattern for mystical events.³ The experience that

2. Chiara Lubich, “Toward a Theology and Philosophy of Unity: The Principal Cornerstones,” in *An Introduction to the Abba School: Conversations from the Focolare’s Interdisciplinary Study Centre* (New York: New City Press, 2002), 28.

3. A summarized version of the “Paradise,” as recalled by Lubich in June 1961, was published in *Nuova Umanità*, in Italian, and in *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, in English (see note 4). As yet, only parts of the full text have been published in scattered sources, mainly in articles of *Nuova Umanità* and *Claritas*. Some extracts appear in English in Chiara Lubich et al., *An Introduction to the Abba School: Conversations from the Focolare’s Interdisciplinary Study Centre* (New York: New City Press, 2002) (with important passages regarding Mary on pages 9 and 27–28). Chiara cited from and alluded to the “Paradise” frequently in her talks and writings, the most important of which are gathered together in Chiara Lubich, *La dottrina spirituale* (Rome: Città nuova, 2006) and published in English as *Essential Writings: Spirituality Dialogue Culture* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2007). On Mary in the “Paradise,” there are three articles by Gerard Rossé in *Nuova Umanità*: “Maria, la realtà dell’ ‘Anima’ alla luce del mistero di Maria nell’esperienza mistica di Chiara Lubich: I. I primi giorni,” *Nuova umanità* 195, no. 3 (2011): 291–314; “La realtà dell’ ‘Anima’ alla luce del mistero di Maria nell’esperienza mistica di Chiara Lubich: II. La Desolata,” *Nuova umanità* 196–97, no. 4–5 (2011): 437–58; “La realtà dell’ ‘Anima’ alla luce del mistero di Maria nell’esperienza mistica di Chiara Lubich: III,” *Nuova umanità*

began in July 1949, when Chiara went for a period of rest to the Dolomite mountains near her hometown of Trent together with some of her first companions, did not emerge from a vacuum. It was the culmination of intense years of living the Word by putting the gospels into practice. This practice had begun in 1943, when Chiara consecrated herself to God and was joined by the first small group of women who were to become the foundational columns of the Focolare Movement. During these years, as they nourished themselves on the Word, on the Eucharist, and on love of their brothers and sisters, the key points of the Focolare spirituality began to clarify, especially the concepts of unity and Jesus Forsaken. Chiara tells us that there came a point when all the words of the gospels seemed to express the same thing: love, which culminated in Jesus Forsaken.⁴

198, no. 6 (2011): 597–610; (hereinafter referred to as “Maria I,” “Maria II,” and “Maria III”). In addition there are articles by Marisa Cerini, “Aspetti della mariologia nella luce dell’insegnamento di Chiara Lubich,” *Nuova umanità* 121, no. 1 (1999): 19–28; Brendan Leahy, “Il Dio di Maria,” *Nuova umanità* 151, no. 1 (2004): 59–70; and Alba Scariglia, “Maria soltanto Parola di Dio,” *Nuova umanità* 200, no. 2 (2012): 189–98. A number of key texts by Chiara on Mary, including some that refer to the “Paradise,” appear in the volume *Maria: Trasparenza di Dio* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2003), published in English as *Mary: The Transparency of God* (New York: New City Press: 2003). I quote from the Italian version. Crucial to an understanding of Mary’s role in the charism of unity is the talk “Maria nell’esperienza del Movimento dei Focolari,” given to a group of bishops in 1987, which appears in a reworked form in *Maria: Trasparenza di Dio*, 15–43. Another useful resource is the dissertation of Leonar Maria Salierno, “*Maria negli scritti di Chiara Lubich*” (Rome: Marianum, 1993), which gathers together nearly all the significant talks and writings of Lubich on Mary up to the year 1993. Translations of the Paradise not previously appearing in English are, in the spirit of the Paradise, the fruit of a collaboration between Callan Slipper, Thomas Masters, Fr. Fabrizio Tosolini, and myself. All translations of other Latin and Italian texts cited are mine unless otherwise stated.

4. What I recount here verbatim is drawn from various accounts of Chiara of the events of 1949, in particular “Paradise” as recalled by Chiara in 1961, published as Chiara Lubich, “Paradise,” *Nuova umanità* 30, no. 3 (2008): 285–96, and in English

It was at this time that a key encounter occurred with Igino Giordani, a man of deep faith, a renowned politician, a writer, and a patristic scholar. It was he who recognized the import of the charism that Chiara had received in a way that her companions, who were young women like herself, could not. Giordani was also to play a key role in the '49 illuminations. Chiara described these circumstances in the following way: Giordani, who had joined Chiara and her companions in the Dolomites, told her that he would like to make a vow of obedience to her in the manner of the followers of Catherine of Siena. Chiara, feeling that this could be an inspiration of the Holy Spirit but not quite comfortable with the idea of someone vowing obedience to her, said to him:

It could really be that what you are feeling comes from God. . . . So tomorrow in church, when Jesus in the Eucharist comes into my heart, as into an empty chalice, I will say to him: “on my nothingness, make a pact of unity with Jesus in the Eucharist in Foco’s⁵ heart. And bring about that bond between us as you see it should be.” Then I added, “And Foco, you do the same.”

After they had made this Pact of Unity, Giordani had to leave for a speaking engagement. But Chiara felt urged to go back into the church:

as “Paradise ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 4–12, accessed August 5, 2014, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=claritas>. The quotes of Chiara are taken from an unpublished talk by Eli Folonari to the Volunteers of the Focolare Movement, entitled “Il patto di unità” (The Pact of Unity), Castelgandolfo, February 6, 2010.

5. Foco, meaning “fire,” was the name Chiara gave to Giordani.

I was about to pray to Jesus in the Eucharist, to call his name, Jesus. But I couldn’t. That Jesus who was in the tabernacle was also in me. I was still myself, but made another him. Therefore, I could not call myself. And then I was aware of a word spontaneously coming from my mouth, “Father,” and in that moment I found myself in the bosom of the Father.

And so, on July 16, the series of illuminations known as “Paradise ’49” began. They continued all that summer and, sporadically, over the next two years. Chiara shared them intensively with Giordani and her first companions, whom she called the “*Anima*,” or Soul. It is important to understand that what was happening was much more than Chiara receiving illuminations that she then passed on to the others. The *Anima* was the protagonist of the illuminations, so they entered as a group into the “Paradise.” This collective entering was possible because of the Pact of Unity they had made (first between Foco and Chiara, and then between Chiara and the others) to love each other to the degree that Jesus had loved in his forsakenness on the Cross, a pact sealed by the Eucharist. The fact that “Paradise ’49” was an experience of communion in which the collective “Soul” participated in the life of the Trinity has important implications for Mary, too. Mary, like all the other realities they experienced, is understood above all in a “collective” (one could say ecclesial) sense.⁶

But let us turn now to the passages themselves. I divide them into two sections. The first deals largely with illuminations on Mary’s role as Theotokos, the Mother or Bearer of God. The

6. This is a subject that Gerard Rossé discusses extensively in his three articles on Mary in the “Paradise.”

second concerns the part she plays in the Redemption as the *Desolata*.⁷ I conclude with some remarks about Chiara's vision of Mary in relation to the Trinity, humanity, and creation (of which Mary is the synthesis, *par excellence*).

First Illuminations

Having entered the bosom of the Father, the *Anima* (Chiara and her companions "united in an infinite abyss of Love"⁸) was the subject of a "mystical marriage" ("And so the Word wedded the Soul in mystical marriage"). It is to this Soul that the Word first presents Mary just two days into the visionary experience, on July 18, 1949: "The Word, having wed the Soul dressed as church, was now first presenting in his home (in Paradise) Mary, his Mother."⁹ The fact that the Word presents Mary to the Soul as church is significant, since she is immediately seen not simply as the mother of Jesus but in her relationship to the Mystical Body of Christ (thus anticipating Vatican II). This will be true throughout the Marian illuminations of the "Paradise," where Mary is never understood in isolation, as is natural for a communitarian spirituality whose core message is unity.

Moreover, Mary does not present herself; rather, it is the Word who presents her to his spouse, the Soul, so that she is part of a single chain, the Word-Mary-Soul-Church-Humanity. If we ignore this collective aspect, it is not possible to appreciate the full meaning of this first encounter with Mary, which Chiara explains at length the next day:

7. I have chosen to maintain the original Italian term, which means "Desolate One," since it is impossible to render into English with a single word. Where appropriate, I translate it as "Mary Desolate." It should also be pointed out that the term "*Desolata*" was in common use in Italian and was by no means original to Chiara.

8. Rossé, "Maria I," 291–92.

9. Rossé, "Maria I," 293.

And then I looked above me, where there was a beautiful statue of the Mother,¹⁰ and I understood that She is only Word of God and I saw Her beautiful beyond telling: all clothed in the Word of God who is the Beauty of the Father; hidden guardian of the Spirit within.

And, as soon as I loved Her, she loved me and with the clarity of Heaven showed me her whole beauty: the Mother of God! ["My God, I said within myself, but She is the Mother of that God the Father and of that Spouse whom I came to know in these last few days? She is truly the Queen of Heaven? And it seemed impossible that She could be so immense, even more immense than Her Son whom She contains in Herself. She is truly the Queen of Heaven and earth!

"Yes, it is true that She is contained by the Trinity, but yesterday I saw Her, because the Son showed Her to me, as containing within Herself the whole of Heaven."]

Outside the sky was of a blue never seen before. . . . And so I understood. The sky contains the sun! Mary contains God! God loved Her so much as to make her His Mother and his Love made Him become small before Her.¹¹

This passage perfectly encapsulates both the novelty of Chiara's vision and her rootedness in the tradition. One might ask, why is Chiara so amazed? Did she not already know that Mary was the mother of God? Did she not know that Mary had contained God and that God had made himself small, had bowed down in an act of kenosis so as to take on our human nature? After all, Mary

10. The term she uses in Italian is "Mamma."

11. July 19, 1949, *Maria: Trasparenza di Dio*, 88. The section in square brackets was omitted by Lubich in her talk but is in the original text of the "Paradise."

had already been definitively proclaimed Theotokos at the Council of Ephesus (431),¹² and from the very earliest times the church had recognized God's extraordinary condescension in taking on human nature. This is evident, for instance, in the motif—found frequently in the textual tradition from the time of Ephrem the Syrian (†c.373) onward—of expressing amazement at Mary's capacity to contain the uncontainable God.¹³ Even the idea of Mary having been “entirely clothed in the Word” is not entirely new. Andrew of Crete (†c.740), for instance, writes of her as the “living book in which the spiritual word has been silently inscribed by the living pen of the Spirit.”¹⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux († 1153) imagines

12. For a summary of the main debates and the politics surrounding the Christological disputes, see Leo D. Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1983). See also David F. Wright, “From ‘God-Bearer’ to ‘Mother of God’ in the Later Fathers,” in *The Church and Mary*, ed. Robert N. Swanson, 22–30 (Woodenbridge: Boydell, 2004); Richard Price, “The *Theotokos* and the Council of Ephesus,” in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Chris Maunder, 89–103 (London: Burns & Oates, 2008) and “Theotokos: The Title and its Significance in Doctrine and Devotion,” in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss, 56–74 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2007). Also see my *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods*. Vol. 1. (New York: New City Press, 2012), 25–30.

13. See, for instance, *Hymns on the Nativity*, 21, 6–8, in Ephrem the Syrian, *Bride of Light: Hymns on Mary from the Syriac Churches*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias Press, 2010). Cyril of Alexandria († 444) greets the Virgin as “you who have contained the Uncontainable in the holy matrix of your virginal womb” and calls her “the location for the One who is uncontainable”; *Homily 4*, which was delivered at Ephesus, and *Homily 11* (Reynolds, *Gateway*, I, 24). Proclus of Constantinople († 446) writes: “Come then, let us admire the Virgin's womb, a womb wider than the world. For she, without difficulty, enclosed within her him who cannot be contained in anyone, and he who carries everyone in his hands, including his Mother, was carried by her in her womb”; *Fourth Homily on the Birth of the Lord*, 1. *Patrologia Graeca*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1857–66), 65 (1862), col. 708C–709B (henceforth *PG*).

14. *Third Homily on the Dormition*, 7, in *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*, ed. Brian E. Daley, 142 (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's, 1998).

Mary praying for the living Word to come and dwell in her, the Word who will speak, not through the words on a page or even through the inspired words of a prophet, but in person, because he will be born of her.¹⁵ It was also commonly held from patristic times onward that Mary was thoroughly familiar with the scriptures.¹⁶ This idea later manifested itself in art, with the Virgin at the Annunciation often shown reading a scroll or a book, usually the Bible open at the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, that foretold a virgin giving birth.¹⁷

What, then, is novel about Chiara's intuition? In the first place, the main purpose of the patristic church's declarations of wonder that the finite Mary could contain the infinite God was to proclaim belief in the dual human and divine natures in the one person of Christ. Heated disputes over the person of Christ dominated much of the patristic period. Chiara's amazement, however, derives from a new illumination, namely, on the greatness of God's design for Mary, which reaches truly cosmic dimensions. The majesty of Mary's calling—to be contained by God (the Trinity) and also to contain God—is extended to her containing Heaven. Now, Heaven is humanity and the whole of God's creation glorified, so that Mary represents the eschatological fulfilment of God's plan for the cosmos. In her we see that the perichoretic telos of every

15. See the *Fourth Sermon on the Glories of the Virgin Mother*, in *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. A priest of Mount Mellary Abbey, 76–7 (Devon: Augustine Publishing Company, 1984) (hereafter *SBS*).

16. In fact, in the very early apocryphal tradition one finds the story that Mary lived in the Temple from the age of three, where she would have been thoroughly educated in the Scriptures, while the *Gospel of the Pseudo-Matthew*, a medieval Latin infancy narrative dating from between the sixth and the eighth centuries that builds on the earlier *Protoevangelium*, describes Mary reading a psalter at the time of the Annunciation.

17. See Jean Fournée, “Les orientations doctrinales de l'iconographie mariale à la fin de l'époque romane,” *Centre international d'études romanes* 1 (1971): 53.

human being is to contain God as he contains us and for each of us to contain within ourselves the entirety of creation.

As to Mary being “clothed in the Word,” it is not simply that she was familiar with scripture, as we have seen in the passages of the church fathers I have quoted, but also that she had so emptied herself that she was, in a certain sense, already all Word of God before he came to dwell in her physically. Lubich expands and deepens the traditional understanding of what attracted God to Mary, namely, was her being filled with grace, and her virtue, especially her virginity and humility. Chiara’s vision offers a new perspective on Mary’s being endowed with grace and virtue, and on her being without sin, or spotless, as she is frequently called in the marvellous panegyric tradition of the East. Her beauty consists in being entirely clothed in the Word, and it is this that attracts God to her: for in her is mirrored the Word who is the beauty of the Father. Only a creature who was entirely Word, and therefore completely in conformity with God’s original design for creation, could contain the Word: “He could not descend into sin and so he ‘invented’ Mary, who, summing up the entire beauty of creation in herself, ‘fooled’ God and attracted him to the earth.”¹⁸

18. “Flower of Humanity,” July 9, 1950, *Maria: Trasparenza di Dio*, 87. Chiara’s understanding that Mary’s beauty consists in her being clothed in the Word is an important contribution to studies on Mary’s beauty, which were given new impetus by Pope Paul VI’s 1975 advocacy of the Marian *via pulchritudinis*. See Paul VI, “Allocutio: In auditorio Pontificii Athenaei a Sancto Antonio in Urbe ob coactos Conventus, VII Mariologicum atque XIV Marianum, 16 maii 1975,” *Marianum* 37 (1975): 491–94, and Johann G. Roten, “Mary and the Way of Beauty,” *Marian Studies* 49 (1998): 109–27. Since patristic times Psalm 44:10–12, “And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty; for he is the Lord thy God, and him thou shalt adore,” had been interpreted in a Marian key, while the Fathers, and even more so medieval theologians, found myriad reasons for her beauty, most of which boiled down to her freedom from sin, her virginity (and from the Middle Ages, her humility), and, after the Incarnation, her Motherhood of God, and finally her assumption into Heaven. Athanasius of Alexandria († 373), in what is one of the first readings of Psalm 44 in a Marian key, believes

What is more, in presenting Mary to the Soul, the Word was also revealing the Soul’s identity to itself, because the experience of the Soul since 1943 had, in a certain sense, mirrored that of the Virgin: they also had lived the Word to the point that they were clothed only in the Word and the Word had mystically married the Soul. In a way, Chiara’s amazement in looking on Mary is a form of self-amazement, of discovering of what she, of what the Soul, is called to be: the Work of Mary, which is the official title of the Focolare Movement.¹⁹

Now to the second part of the description, where Chiara speaks of Mary being like the sky that contains the Sun. Here, too, she is drawing, perhaps unconsciously, on the tradition, both theologically, as we have already seen in terms of the uncontainable God being contained within Mary’s womb, and typologically, since Christ had long been identified with the Sun of Justice (Mal 4:2) while Mary was the dawn sky that announced his arrival.²⁰ But here the vision is more cosmic and hints at later

that because God foreknew the Virgin would be beautiful and pleasing to him proves that he truly became incarnate from her, rather than simply passing through her, as the Docetists maintained (*Letter to Marcellinus*, 6, (PG 27, 16B–C). The *Life of Mary* attributed to Maximus the Confessor († 662), trans. Stephen Shoemaker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), dedicates almost a whole chapter (chapter 7) to Mary’s beauty, while the thirteenth-century *Mariale super missus est*, vol. 37, ed. Emile Borgnet (Paris: Vivès, 1898), 62–246, long attributed to Albert the Great († 1280), offers fully 150 reasons for Mary being beautiful. Bonaventure († 1274) names “beautifying grace” among the seven graces that Mary received. See his *Fifth Sermon on the Annunciation* in *Testi mariani del secondo millennio*, ed. Angelo Amato et al., 8 vols. (Rome: Città Nuova, 1996–2011) (henceforth *TMSM*), IV, 268–9.

19. That the calling of the Focolare is to “repeat” Mary, in a certain sense, both individually and collectively, is confirmed many times by Chiara. In particular see her meditation, “I want to see her again in you,” published in *Meditations* (London: New City, 1989), 52–53.

20. Already in the fathers we find the motif of the sun and the dawn, for instance, Chrysippus of Jerusalem († 479), *Homily on the Holy Mother of God*, *Testi mariani del primo millennio*, ed. Georges Gharib et al., 4 vols. (Rome: Città Nuova, 1988–1991),

illuminations where Mary is revealed in her relationship to the whole of creation.

The breadth of this vision is beautifully interpreted in a stained-glass window in the Church of the Theotokos in Loppiano, Italy, designed by Dina Figueiredo.²¹ Here, at one level, we have in abstract form the same concept as a Byzantine icon of the Theotokos or a medieval portrait of the Madonna and Child. The blue glass symbolizes Mary, while the yellow circle in the center at the bottom represents the Christ child. All icons of Mary in some way invoke the relationship between herself and the Christ child and convey some message about him to the faithful. The Hodigitria tells us to look to him for guidance, the Panakranta and the medieval *sedes sapientiae* tell us that he is Wisdom, and so on.

What do we learn from Chiara's illumination as interpreted in this window? First and foremost, we learn that Mary is the Theotokos, she who contained the infinite God. But the blue expanse also tells us that Mary is the synthesis of the cosmos,²² who is apparently greater than the Sun. Chiara says in her unpublished writings from Paradise '49 that like the blue sky, Mary is the background of creation and heaven, "as if she had her feet on earth and her head in Heaven." But it is from the Sun that she receives her Light-Life. Moreover, we understand that it is because she makes herself nothing that she can be a silent background, colored with the infinite shades of the Word, allowing the Sun to shine all the more and truly magnifying the Lord. And at yet another level,

I, 603 (henceforth *TMPM*), and Jacob of Serug († 521), *Homily on the Blessed Virgin Mary Generatrix of God*. *TMPM*, IV, 155–56.

21. Numerous images of the window are available online, including this one: https://c1.staticflickr.com/3/2066/2334119426_ac6fa89a56.jpg.

22. In a later note, dated July 9, 1950, Chiara writes: "Mary, even though she is just one [person] is the synthesis of the whole of creation at the height of its beauty, when it presents itself as bride to its Creator," *Trasparenza*, 85.



the yellow disc can represent the Eucharist, the flesh of Christ, which he received from his mother. This is another rich vein of Mariology on which Chiara sheds new light, though we do not have the space to explore it here.²³

The Second "Fiat": The Desolation

Already in the intuitions of July 18–19 it was implicit that Mary's greatness lay above all in her "nothingness," since it was only by being completely empty of herself and "clothing" herself in the Word that she had "attracted" God to herself and the events of

23. See Chiara Lubich, *The Eucharist* (Hyde Park, N.Y.: New City Press, 2005). Of particular interest is the section where she deals with the Eucharist and the transformation of the cosmos, which can be related to the eschatological role of Mary's bodily assumption into heaven.

the Incarnation had been set in motion. The nature of Mary's nothingness clarifies when we move to the second stage of the illuminations, which begins on July 27. Here, Chiara understands that Mary's first "fiat"²⁴ (Luke 1:38) at the Annunciation is not the only, or even the highest, moment of assent. Instead, it is at the cross, when she endures a "desolation" that corresponds to Jesus' forsakenness, that the full majesty of Mary's design in the economy of salvation is revealed:

But to be Mary it is necessary to be Jesus Forsaken or also the desolate Virgin: to offer oneself to suffer the privation of the Son: to rejoice in being without: Peace, Joy, Health . . . that which is her: feeling yourself to be her desolated.²⁵

". . . because you are desolate"; that is, to be only: Word of God. To preserve within oneself only the Word of God.

". . . and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus . . ."

Generate in oneself (by sanctifying oneself for the others = living the Word who generates Christ in all the Soul) Jesus for oneself and for souls.²⁶

Our first observation is that Mary has taken on a new measure: No longer is she the young woman assenting to the Incarnation. Now she is saying a "yes" of a far higher order. In one sense, it seems that Chiara is not saying anything new, given that it has long been believed that Mary endured unspeakable suffering in witnessing her son's death on the cross. In the West many writers follow Ambrose († 397), who movingly evokes her stoic

24. *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*; Be it done unto me according to thy word.

25. In other words, we have to be like Mary, who is truly herself when she is desolate, when she experiences herself as desolated.

26. July 27, 1949; Rosse, "Maria II," 441.

martyrdom as she witnessed the agony and death of her son,²⁷ while in the patristic East harrowing portrayals of Mary's distress on Calvary exist from at least the fifth century²⁸ and give rise to dramatic poems known as *Planctus Mariae*, among which the earliest and best is by Romanos the Melodist († c.560).²⁹ By the seventh century, in Maximus the Confessor († 662), who speaks of the sword of Simeon (Lk 2:34-35) piercing Mary on Calvary,³⁰ we already see a recognition that she shared in an extraordinary way in Christ's suffering, while by the ninth century, when fathers such as Andrew of Crete and John of Damascus († 749) speak of Mary suffering the pangs of birth at the foot of the cross that she avoided at the birth of Jesus, there is at least an implicit recognition that, fully aware now of the awful implications, she is being asked to repeat the "yes" that she spoke at the Incarnation.³¹

27. *De institutione virginis*, 49; *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols., ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-65), 16 (1841), col. 333 (henceforth *PL*).

28. See, for instance, the apocryphal *Acta Pilati B* known as the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition*, trans. Joseph Berigan (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 34.

29. The main purpose was to encourage the faithful to dwell on Christ's suffering and its meaning through the eyes of the Virgin. On Romanos' plaint, see Elisabeth Catafygiotou-Topping, "Mary at the Cross: St. Romanos Kontakion for Holy Friday," *Byzantine Studies / Études Byzantines* 4 (1977): 18-37; Gregory Dobrov, "A Dialogue with Death: Ritual Lament and the θρήνος Θεοτόκου of Romanos Melodes," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 35 (1994): 385-405; and Niki Tsironis, "The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nicodemia," Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1998.

30. From the time of Origen (*In Lucam*, 6, 3-4, and 17, 6-7, *PG* 13, 1814-15 and 1845), the sword has been connected with the suffering of Calvary in the Eastern Church, but in a negative sense of a prophecy that Mary, like all the disciples, would suffer a loss of faith. Maximus is possibly the first Eastern Father to put an entirely positive spin on it.

31. See, respectively, *Triodion for Palm Sunday*, *Theotokion*, *Ode VIII*, *TMPM*, II, 464, and *Exposition on the Orthodox Faith*, 6, 14, *TMPM*, II, 493-94.

But if Jesus's cry on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," is the moment of his greatest suffering—rather than his night in Gethsemane, as most held at that time—when he emptied himself and "lost" his relationship with the Father out of love, then Mary Desolate takes on a whole new significance, because her self-emptying and the loss of her relationship with the Son, also out of love, directly correspond to the experience of Jesus. This correspondence is entirely new in the history of Mariology. It is clear from Chiara's text that she understands Mary Desolate to be, in one sense, the same as Jesus Forsaken. Indeed, she says that to be Mary one can be either Jesus Forsaken or Mary Desolate because of the absolute identification that the *Desolata* experiences with the forsaken Jesus. And so, just as Chiara has said of Jesus Forsaken that every negative adjective in the dictionary could be applied to him,³² the same could be said of Mary Desolate. To be Mary means to embrace everything negative and transform it through Jesus Forsaken into love.

But there is something more. Because the *Desolata*, through the grace of her love for Jesus Forsaken, generates Jesus in herself but not for herself, we, too, should imitate her so that he can be present in us as he was in the Soul. One does not sanctify oneself for oneself but for the sanctification of others.³³ The Jesus that is generated by this process is not the Incarnate Jesus of the Annunciation but the Risen Jesus of Easter whom Chiara and her companions found present in the Soul-Church ("Where two or

32. Unpublished talk, "The Clothes of Jesus Forsaken," Rocca di Papa, June 1, 1972.

33. This may be better understood by a recent experience of a dear friend of mine. Having been diagnosed with a very serious cancer, his first thought was to prepare well for death, looking upon this as what God wanted for him. But then, having received many messages of concern from people, he thought of the pain his death would cause them, and therefore vowed that he would do all he could to get better out of love for them, not for himself.

three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Mt 18:20).

Once again we see how the experience of Paradise '49 was collective and how it emphasizes how the understood realities transfer into the life of the collective Soul, not the individual soul or souls of those who are participating in the event. The lesson learned from Mary Desolate is that the individual must not remain transfixed in some sort of mystical transport, contemplating the wounds of Christ, but needs to "go beyond the wound," as Chiara puts it elsewhere, to love others.³⁴ One must not content oneself with generating Christ in one's own soul but instead should imitate Mary Desolate in losing Jesus in oneself so as to generate the Risen Christ in the souls of others and in the midst of the Soul.

In a passage written about a month after this first intuition of Mary Desolate, Chiara returns to the same theme, this time adding some extra elements:

The *Desolata* also has the Wound.³⁵ And in that Wound inflicted on her heart by the forsakenness of Jesus: "Woman behold your Son" (John 19.26) . . . (the silence regarding He who is replaced by John is the pinnacle of suffering and is comparable to the silence of God in the forsakenness of Jesus) . . . John entered in, and with him the whole of

34. See "Maria nell'esperienza del Movimento dei Focolari," *Trasparenza*, 34: "It was necessary to go decisively beyond the wound, it was necessary to embrace the Forsaken One so that the Risen One would always shine forth in us, the new creature. Only in this way would we be like Mary."

35. We can understand what Chiara means by wound in another passage: "Now Jesus is making me understand that we too have to be *Wounded*: to have a void in our hearts and in the void the whole of Heaven and earth with all the children of God and all of creation." Rossé, "Maria II," 447.

humanity. The sons of men re-enter the most pure Womb of Mary, out of which issued the Son, so as to enter into God . . . in Mary.³⁶ She is the Gate of Heaven. You cannot be Christian if you are not Marian. You cannot be divine unless you are immaculate. You cannot go to Jesus if not through Mary. You cannot possess the Forsaken One if not through the *Desolata*.³⁷

Here Chiara uses a series of traditional motifs but not their traditional meanings. When the fathers spoke of Mary as the Gate of Heaven, it was to affirm her virginity or that through her had come the salvation of the world.³⁸ Later on, beginning with the likes of Andrew of Crete and Germanus of Constantinople († 733), the epithet was understood primarily in terms of her mediatory role in Heaven, where she intervened constantly on behalf of sinners.³⁹ The motto, “*ad Iesum per Mariam*” (To Jesus through Mary), which was popularized in the eleventh century by Peter Damien († 1072) and which Chiara adopts here, also had essen-

tially the same meaning: that as it was through Mary that Jesus became incarnate, so it is through her that sinners can receive the grace to reach heaven.⁴⁰ Chiara instead sees Mary’s mediation entirely in terms of the relationship between the *Desolata* and Jesus Forsaken. Here, she is closer to the tradition of Marian plaints we mentioned earlier, whose purpose was to allow the faithful to participate vicariously in the Passion of Christ by experiencing the emotions of Mary. But the identification that we can experience with Jesus Forsaken through Mary Desolate is far deeper than mere empathy.

Chiara identifies the *Desolata* for the first time in this passage specifically with John 19:26-7, the moment when Jesus tells his mother that from now on the apostle John is her son. In traditional Mariology, Mary’s presence at the cross is interpreted in terms of two moments. The first is John 19:25, which describes Mary standing by the cross together with Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. This moment, in the Western tradition, has been interpreted since the time of Ambrose as an indication of Mary’s dignified and recollected grief throughout the passion and death of Jesus (an attitude portrayed most beautifully in Michelangelo’s *Pietà*). The second is the moment when Jesus addresses his mother and consigns her into the care of the John. For most of the patristic period very little attention was paid to this event. It served only as a proof that Mary did not have any other children, since Jesus would hardly have handed her over to John if he had had siblings who could have taken care of her. The act was taken at face value as an act of filial piety, albeit an impressive one given Jesus’s extreme

40. Damien’s precise words from which the motto is believed to have been coined were: “Since it was through you that the Son of God deigned to descend to us, so it is through you that we may attain communion with him” (*Sermon for the Nativity of the BVM*, 46, 7, *PL* 144, 761B).

36. The term Chiara uses is “*indiarsi*,” literally “to ingod,” which to the best of my knowledge first occurs in Dante’s *Paradiso* 4, 28. It is almost never found thereafter, although its Latin equivalent is to be found elsewhere. This is one of several terms that Chiara uses that may have been inspired by the *Commedia*, which she would have known well.

37. “Gate of Heaven,” September 28, 1949, *Trasparenza*, 93.

38. The typological interpretation of Mary as the closed gate (see Ez 44.1-3) who remains a virgin and gives admittance only to God goes back at least as far as Ephrem the Syrian, and in the West is already found in Jerome († 419).

39. By the fifth century the gate was also being interpreted in terms of Mary’s mediation, as is evident from the *Akathistos Hymn*, where she is addressed thus: “Hail, key to the gates of Paradise” (7, 9), “Hail, gate of hallowed mystery” (15, 7), “Hail, through whom Paradise is opened; / Hail, key to the kingdom of Christ” (15, 15, 16), cited from the translation of the *Akathistos* by Leena Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). The epithet is widely found in medieval texts, especially hymns.

agony. In the ninth century, however, George of Nicodemia († after 880) offered a new interpretation of these lines, identifying this as the moment when Mary passes from being the mother of Jesus to the universal mother: “Now I constitute her not only as your Mother, but of all the others too. I place her as guide to the disciples and I absolutely desire that she be honoured because of her privilege as Mother.”⁴¹

It would take several centuries for Western commentators to posit such a clear link between John 19:26-27 and Mary’s universal motherhood of humanity. Anselm of Lucca († 1086), writing on the Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:22-38), is perhaps the first to do so.⁴² Chiara’s words are particularly reminiscent of two twelfth-century theologians: Eadmer of Canterbury († c.1124) states that he believes the moment of greatest suffering for Mary was when Jesus gave her into the care of John, depriving her, in a certain sense, of her divine motherhood. Rupert of Deutz († 1130) affirms that with the role Christ assigned her of being the mother of John, Mary becomes the mother of all humanity.⁴³

On the surface, then, we are in the presence of a fairly orthodox restatement of traditional Catholic belief. But Lubich’s understanding goes further than this because Mary’s loss of divine motherhood is intimately linked to her being the *Desolata* who leads on to Jesus Forsaken. This link becomes clearer if we read another note dated October 2, 1949, which goes under the title “Today in the Glory of the Trinity we are the *Desolata*-Creation”:

41. Homily 8, *TMPM*, II, 756.

42. See his *Oratio ad suscipiendum corpus Christi* 1, Henri Barré, *Prières anciennes de l'Occident à la Mère du Sauveur: Des origines à saint Anselme* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1963), 227.

43. Respectively, *De excellentia Virginis Mariae liber*, 5, *PL* 159, 567A-B, and *Commentaria in Evangelium S. Joannis*, 13, *PL* 169, 790A-B.

It [the “*fiat*” of the Desolation] is a different “*fiat*” from the first: with the first she was renouncing virginity (apparently); with the second she is renouncing Maternity—also here apparently—. Only in this way is she the Mother of all. She acquires divine Maternity of an infinite number of souls renouncing her divine Maternity of her First Son. And this fact too is according to the divine economy. She gives one and she has one hundred.

But what suffering she endured at the cry of forsakenness of Jesus we cannot imagine. It was the moment when she would have wished to be closest to Him. But she had already lost Him as his Mother, had no right to be a Mother to Him, and faced with the passage from one Maternity to another which Jesus had indicated to her, she could not complain or break down.

Therefore, in that moment Jesus had neither Mother nor Father. He was nothingness born of nothingness.

And Mary was also suspended in nothingness. Her greatness had been her divine Maternity. Now it had been taken away from her.

So the *Desolata* at that moment—by divine will—did not participate in the Redemption. She was excluded by her Son who alone offered Himself for everyone including her. And at the same time she participated in it with an infinite intensity because it was precisely there that she was made our Mother.

Now divine Maternity was hers, therefore not a human Mother but divine, infinite. And so begetting God. Because [she is] divine Mother she can be Mother of us all.⁴⁴

44. This passage appears in sections in Rossé, “Maria II,” 450–53.

Now the full extent of Chiara's illumination becomes clear: Mary's desolation is a two-stage process, but not in the sense it had been understood before. First comes her acceptance of the loss of any rights of maternity over her divine Son, in exchange for which she receives John.⁴⁵ Here she is giving up the entire beauty of her personal relationship with Jesus, all the riches and fruits of the years she had lived in intimate contact with him, all the wonder and beauty of the last three years of his life, when he had revealed himself publicly. And for what? So that she may love him in John, who represents each brother and sister, now that her maternity has become collective. In other words, she is losing God in herself in order to love him in the other; this is the mirror image of what Jesus will do, but at an entirely different level because he is the Second Person of the Trinity, when he "loses" the Father in his cry of forsakenness. The second moment cannot happen without this initial loss of divine maternity. Now Mary does not just lose Jesus in herself but, excluded from the moment of Redemption, as is the whole of creation (since only God can redeem), her loss takes on a universal, one could even say cosmic, dimension in that she experiences the absence of God in everything. Even her Son is at this moment, in a certain sense, without God ("my God, my God"). It is because of that loss of God that she, too, like the rest of humanity, is in need of redemption. And yet, because she has lost God, emptied herself of him out of love, just as Jesus Forsaken did on a divine scale, Mary paradoxically participated in the Redemption to such a degree that she became the universal mother.

This entirely new way of understanding Mary's participation in the Passion casts in new light the question of the Marian

45. Origen already recognizes that Mary finds Christ in John on the basis of the Pauline affirmation that it is not he who lives but Christ in him, *In Johannes*, 1, 6, PG, 14.32.

coredemption, a notion that remains a source of controversy and debate in the Catholic Church because it bridges the divide between those who deny the possibility of Mary having in any way contributed to the Redemption and those who affirm that she did in some way co-operate in it.⁴⁶

That Christ alone objectively brought about the Redemption is the unequivocal teaching of the church. Paul affirms that there is only one mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:5), and the church fathers, most notably Augustine, also confirm this teaching.⁴⁷ What is at question is whether Mary could have subjectively associated herself with the Redemption. Most of the fathers did not even raise the question of Mary's participation in the Redemption, other than to recognize her more indirect role of incarnating the Word. An exception is Ambrose, but he does so only to exclude the possibility.⁴⁸ In the medieval West, however, following on from the new awareness of Mary's universal motherhood, which we have already discussed, theologians began to consider the question of her contribution to the Redemption. Bernard of Clairvaux seems to suggest that Mary plays an active

46. The discussion that follows draws on my chapter on the immediate co-redemption in Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven*, 1, especially 272–75. Older works that deal with the immediate co-redemption include: E. Druwé, "La médiation universelle de Marie," in *Maria: Études sur la Sainte Vierge*. 8 vols., ed. Hubert du Manoir, 417–600 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1949–71), vol. I; Juniper Carol, *De Corredemptione Beatae Virginis Mariae: Disquisitio Positiva* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1950); and Gabriele M. Roschini, *Problematica sulla Corredenzione* (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1969). Two more recent studies that support the doctrine are Brunero Gherardini, *La corredentrice nel mistero di Cristo e della Chiesa* (Monopoli: Vivere In, 1998), and Mark Miravalle, *"With Jesus": The Story of Mary Co-Redemptrix* (Goleta, Calif.: Queenship Publishing, 2003). See also the collection of articles in *Theotokos*, 72 (1999).

47. See *De Trinitate*, 4, 14, 19, and *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, 1, 28, 56, *Sant'Agostino, Augustinus Hipponensis*, accessed June 15, 2014, <http://www.augustinus.it/links/inglese/index.htm>

48. *De institutione virginis*, 49; PL 16, 318B–319A, [333].

role in the Redemption by offering Jesus to the Father as a victim for the reconciliation of the world.⁴⁹ Although he does not explicitly state that she co-operated in the Passion, he does use the term “compassion” (*compassio*) when he speaks of the sword that pierced her heart at her Son’s death (Luke 2:38) and states that she was fully aware of the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice, sharing in it as she did to a degree greater than any other creature.⁵⁰ But the first fully worked out justification of the coredemption was by Arnold of Bonneval († after 1156), a disciple of Bernard of Clairvaux.⁵¹ Building on the Irenaeus principle of recapitulation,⁵² he affirms that the New Eve not only shared in the process of reversing original sin through giving birth to the new Adam but also freely chose to share in the Passion of her Son. Thus the Passion and co-passion, which are the free act of a man and a woman, became a counter-parallel to Adam and Eve’s rejection of God. As a creature, Mary cannot contribute anything to Christ’s redemptive act, but because her Son accepts her self-offering and presents it to the Father, she participates in the Redemption through her Son and thus contributes to the restoration of creation.⁵³

49. *Third Sermon on the Purification*, PL 183, 370.

50. See “Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption,” *SBS*, 226–27.

51. See Ricardo Struve Haker, “Arnoldo de Bonavalle: Primer teólogo de la Corrección mariana,” *Regina mundi* 7 (1963): 48–75.

52. See Matthew C. Steenberg, “The Role of Mary as co-Recapitulator in St. Irenaeus of Lyons,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 58 (2004): 117–13, and my discussion in *Gateway*, 110–13.

53. “Lord, where are thy ancient mercies” (Psalms 88:50). “What are you waiting for? The time has already come: before you are your Mother and John, whom you love. You speak to the thief but do not speak to your Mother? She who is blessed amongst women looks at you and, with her eyes fixed upon you, she contemplates your wounds with maternal pity. And although she is not unaware of the good that your Passion is procuring for the world, she nevertheless feels that she is dying with you in her maternal affection while her Mother’s heart is crushed by an unspeakable suffering. She sighs within herself and holds back the tears that want to burst forth; and the more

Chiara’s understanding fits with this explanation but goes further. The paradox of the logic of Jesus Forsaken (which is also the logic of the Trinity) means that by the very fact of not being (out of love), one is both lost and found:

Jesus lost the Father or, rather, God (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”) and he found Him again in Himself (“whoever gives up his life . . .”). Mary lost Jesus and found Him again in Herself, in fact She became Jesus in the Upper Room among the disciples and the Holy Spirit descended to make Her truly Jesus, because Jesus gained Him⁵⁴ for Her in the His Forsakenness.

her anguish swells, the more is she forbidden from showing it and from relieving her feelings with cries and laments. Every now and again sobs slipped out, but they were controlled and stifled so that they went back into the depths of the mind from which they had come out where they clashed against each other. In her soul a strong storm blew up while violent emotions assailed her. . . . Do not marvel if in that tabernacle you could see two altars: one in the heart of Mary, the other in the body of Christ. Christ immolated his flesh, Mary her soul. She truly wished to add the blood of her heart to the blood of her soul, and, raising her hands to the Cross [she wished] to celebrate the vespertine sacrifice with her Son, and with the Lord Jesus, to consummate the mystery of our Redemption, through her mortal body. But this was the exclusive task of the High Priest, to bring, that is, the offering of his own blood to the sanctuary, and he could not let anyone else participate in this dignity. Indeed, in the Redemption of man, no angel and no other man had or could have this power in common with him. Nevertheless, that affection of his Mother, according to her capacity, cooperated greatly in placating God, because the love of Christ presented both his own offering and that of his Mother to the Father, given that what the Mother asked the Son confirmed and the Father granted. The Father loved the Son and the Son the Father; and after the two of them came the Mother in the ardour of her charity, and if the functions were different the objective, which the good Father, the pious Son and the holy Mother sought and which love caused them to work out together, was the same. Contemporaneously, piety, charity and goodness penetrated each other: the Mother beseeched, the Son interceded and the Father forgave.” *De septem verbis Domini in cruce*, 3, PL 189, 1693A–1695A.

54. In the sense that it was through his forsakenness that Jesus “breathed” the Spirit.

Mary lost Jesus to find Him again in Herself and in the others. . . . The Spirit descended on her and on the disciples. So Jesus, in the His Forsakenness lost God in order to find Him in Himself and in his brothers.

Therefore: if Jesus gave God, he will find God again (other than in Himself in the Mystical Body of Christ).

This is the justice of the divine economy.

If Mary gave Jesus she will find Him again in her children: the mystical body of Mary is justice.⁵⁵

And so it is that Mary, by not being what she was (the mother of God), becomes his mother in us. In exchange for the loss of the divine maternity of Jesus she receives the divine maternity of humanity. Moreover, since Mary Desolate corresponds perfectly to Jesus Forsaken, she is perfectly redeemed. In fact, Jesus Forsaken had need of someone in whom his redemptive sacrifice would bear perfect fruit,⁵⁶ and this someone is Mary Desolate, in whom humanity and creation are made new and through whom the Church is generated. In “losing” the Father, Jesus abandoned himself to Him, through whom he rises again, his humanity divinized. Mary

Desolate, in losing Jesus, rediscovers him through the Spirit as the Risen Lord present in her children, all the members of the church and of humanity. No longer is she just immaculate, but, like the Risen Jesus, she too is divinized:

When the Mother in her Desolation, at the foot of the Cross (“Woman, behold your Son”), lost her divine mandate of the human-divine Maternity of Jesus and became—with the descent of the Holy Spirit—Jesus, her immaculate flesh changed into divine flesh: she became Jesus in soul and in body. She became the true Daughter of God, Daughter of her Son, of Jesus Forsaken to whom she had given immaculate flesh. And she was on a par with Jesus⁵⁷ and could preside in the Upper Room and become Jesus among the Apostles who were also Jesus, thanks to Her sacrifice: because She had given Jesus and received back a hundred: Jesus in Her and Jesus in them. Therefore the Apostles were immaculatised, that is they had the flesh of Mary. They were her children in body and in soul.⁵⁸

55. September 28, 1949; Rossé, “Maria II,” 447. Chiara here capitalizes the pronouns of Mary to emphasise how she has been divinized, has become totally Jesus through her emptiness of self. By “justice” Lubich means the law of the divine economy, namely, that it is in not being that one is, in losing that one finds.

56. This is one of the arguments of John Scotus in favor of the Immaculate Conception: if Jesus had not saved at least one person perfectly, he would not be the perfect Redeemer. Indeed, Mary was especially in need of the merits of the Passion, which were anticipated in her case (*praeredemptio*), so that she would never be inhabited by sin, which would have closed off the means of Redemption. See *Questiones disputatae de Immaculata Conceptione BMV, TMSM*, IV, 438–48. For further discussion and a bibliography, see my chapter in *Gateway to Heaven* on the Immaculate Conception, especially 367–69.

57. Here Chiara is not saying that Mary has become a goddess but that as a result of her complete identification with Jesus’s act of Redemption in his forsakenness, and the consequent breathing forth of the Holy Spirit, she has been divinized, so that she now partakes in the divine nature of her Son. As in the passage above, this is why Mary is designated with capitals here. *Theosis*, or divinization is a central notion in patristic theology, particularly in the Eastern tradition, in such writers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Maximus the Confessor. It is also present in the West, where it is termed *deificatio*, for instance in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. See, for example, *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Clarke, 2006), and *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

58. October 10, 1949: Rossé, “Maria III,” 601.

Mary Desolate, having lost Jesus, becomes the Risen, divinized Jesus through the descent of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus breathes forth on the cross. This leads us to the final step in Chiara's understanding of Mary's coredemption, which consists in her gathering the fruits of her Son's Redemption. Having emptied herself of her Son out of love (just as he emptied himself of himself out of love) she now rediscovers him in the universal love that she has for all humanity, as the mother of all: "The *Desolata* is beautiful in this turning of Herself towards humanity to gather the fruits of the death of her Son: truly co-redemptrix in this collaboration in the ransom of all."⁵⁹

Mary, Humanity, and Creation

It is important to remember that the experience of Paradise '49 is not an end in itself. The entrance of the Soul into the bosom of the Father and the many illuminations on Mary that we have discussed should not be treated merely as some sort of intellectual exercise but must be understood in terms of their implications for the world in which we live. Chiara's illuminations on Mary Desolate have very real consequences in the here and now, both in the way we live our lives and in our understanding of the relationship between creation and Creator.

In each of the illuminations on Mary (and this is also true of other illuminations in Paradise '49), the realities that Chiara sees in the bosom of the Father become life in the experience of the Soul, which is destined to "incarnate itself" in the Work of Mary, in the church, and more generally in humanity. Jesus Forsaken and Mary Desolate are the highest expressions of how humanity can repeat the life of the Trinity on earth and bring about that unity that is at the core of the charism Chiara received. We, too,

59. October 2, 1949: Rossé, "Maria II," 455.

like Chiara and her companions who formed the Soul, can repeat this experience in our own lives:

And we too who take this course—by means of this narrow road (so narrow that it is full of God, of the Trinity, and only the Pure Spirit, Love, who is Simplicity, can pass along it)—we have to be wounded, and that is, totally empty of ourselves, also of God in us (and this is loving the Trinity): be nothing, that is, which means Jesus Forsaken: that is, the brother who should be lived in us (and nothingness is capable of receiving him into itself), Mary Desolate, Jesus Forsaken.⁶⁰

And again, some days later:

We must be the living *Desolata* who renounces the Son, who is Father and Brother and Everything for Her, for Jesus whom we must edify in others. For Her this means the forsakenness of God. But woe to Her if she hadn't done it!

Her very "fiat" at the Incarnation would have been worth nothing because She would have impeded the Redemption. The Blood of Jesus which is the Holy Spirit (Blood of God) would not have been passed on to Her brothers.

The entire work of Jesus depends on Mary.⁶¹

At first glance, this statement would seem almost heretical. How could Mary have impeded the Redemption, since only a refusal by Jesus himself could have done so? However, there is a long

60. October 10, 1949: Rossé, "Maria III," 603.

61. October 15, 1949: Rossé, "Maria III," 603.

tradition in the church of saying that the Incarnation depended on Mary's assent, so why not the Redemption?⁶² Lubich's insight is that for the Redemption to come about in the way that it did required Mary to become nothing, to empty herself, and to exclude herself from it. Being nothing she did not add anything to the nothingness of Jesus Forsaken, so that he alone brought about our Redemption. Moreover, if Mary had not completely emptied herself, by losing God in Jesus for God in humanity, the Redemption would have had no perfect object upon which it could act, as we have already pointed out, and therefore it would have been impeded. So what we should understand here is that Chiara is not saying that Mary could objectively impede the Redemption, any more than she could objectively contribute to it, but that by refusing to assent to it she would have been an obstacle to the flowing forth onto humanity of the grace that the Redemption unleashed. It is in this sense that she is co-operator in the Redemption, or coredemptrix.

And the same is true for us: Without the co-operation of humanity, salvation is merely a theory. Woe to us, too, then, if we do not learn from Mary Desolate that we must lose God in ourselves for God in our fellows! Like Mary we must "run towards humanity"⁶³ in order to generate it anew in the Risen Christ, and

62. Of course God could have chosen to bring about the Redemption in another way, but he did not, so in this sense Mary could have prevented it, as Anselm of Canterbury († 1109), says in his *Oratio* 7 (51), *PL* 158, 955A–956B. Bernard of Clairvaux makes a similar point in his *Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption* (*SBS*, 206) and famously portrays the whole of Creation, the angels in heaven, the patriarchs and prophets, even God himself, waiting with bated breath for Mary to give her assent to the Incarnation (*Fourth Sermon on the Glories of the Virgin Mother*, *SBS*, 70–71).

63. "I see Her with Him, running towards humanity which has become God for them out of love for God, ready, both of them, to leave everything for us. So we—like them—must leave God for people, leave unity for the 'Jesus Forsakens' spread

in this sense we can become "co-creators" alongside her of the "new heavens and new earth" (Is 65:17; see Rv 21:1) to which Jesus Forsaken gave life in an act of re-creation:

Mary's originality was—although in her unique perfection—the same as it should be for every Christian: to repeat Christ, the Truth, the Word, with the personality that God has given to each of us. Just as the leaves of a tree are all the same and yet each is different from the other, so it is of Christians,—and, indeed, all people—: all are equal yet different. In fact, each of us recapitulates the whole of creation within ourselves. Therefore, each person, being "a creation" is the same as the others but different at the same time.⁶⁴

Finally, since it is through Mary that "all of creation [is] purified and redeemed" and it is through her that creation returns to God,⁶⁵ we must look to her if we are to understand the telos of

throughout the world. Make unity the launching pad towards humanity." October 2, 1949: Rossé, "Maria II," 445.

64. *Trasparenza*, 23.

65. See *Trasparenza*, 32. In so stating, Chiara is placing herself in a long line of commentators stretching back to Irenaeus, who sees Mary as the recapitulator of Eve, restoring the damage she did through original sin (see *Adversus Haereses*, 3, 22, 4, and 5, 19, 1); Proclus of Constantinople sees her as the *locus* where the whole Trinity has acted so that creation might be remade and human nature returned again to its divine image and likeness (*First Sermon on Mary, the Mother of God*, 1, *TMPM*, I, 557). A homily attributed to Modestus of Jerusalem († 634) links not just the Incarnation but the bodily Assumption with the restoration of creation for the first time (*Homily on the Dormition of the Mother of God*, 7, *TMPM*, II, 129). For Germanus of Constantinople, the Assumption completes the process begun in the Incarnation, since it was necessary for Mary to pass through death and then be assumed into heaven in order that she should fully become the Mother of Life, cancelling out the corruption of death caused by Eve (*First Homily on the Dormition*, 6, Daley, *On the Dormition*, 158–59). For Anselm of Canterbury Mary's *fiat* unleashes a re-creation of the whole of God's original

humanity, the eschatological destiny of creation, which is to return to the bosom of the Father, where she already is:

Because there is in God a perfect perichoresis between the three divine Persons, and because, through Christ, in the Spirit, there is also a perichoresis between the Trinity and humanity, apex and synthesis of creation (You loved them even as you loved me [Jn 17:23]), all creation, recapitulated in Christ, is also destined to be, as Mary already is, eternally set into the Trinity: that is to live and rejoice infinitely in the intimate life of God, in the ever new and unending dynamism of the Trinitarian relationships.⁶⁶

This is why Chiara, in a message addressed to a branch of the Focolare Movement that concerns itself with the incarnation of the spirituality in the world's different activities, presents the glorified Mary, assumed into heaven body and soul, as the model to whom one should look in seeking to transform humanity and return it to the Father:

It [Mary's glorified body] is the symbol of that human part which God created and which has to return to him, completely transformed. It is the symbol of all the expressions of humanity in the world, of that incarnation in society, in the economy, in art, in education, in health, etc. It is in this

[incarnation] that you see traced out the luminous path that will lead you to God, bringing with you society which has been transfigured.⁶⁷

I leave the last word to Chiara, who says: "Just as Mary brought Creation into Paradise in her body, so you too must not aspire to enter [Paradise] without a world renewed."⁶⁸

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creation, and she herself, in some way, contains all of this new creation within herself, not only because she bore the Creator in her womb but also because she herself is the synthesis of nature perfected and redeemed, through her absolute conformity to the divine blueprint. *Oratio* 7(51), 4–7, *Gateway*, 136–37.

66. "Toward a Theology and Philosophy of Unity," *An Introduction to the Abba School*, 28.

67. *Message for the Feast of the Assumption*, August 15, 1980.

68. Unpublished "Message of the 40th Anniversary of the Birth of the 'Volunteers,'" Meeting of the Volunteers of God, Rocca di Papa, November 6, 1996.