

Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians

Divine Adoption and Divine Design¹

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to a Trinitarian dynamic in both the letter and Chiara's experience. Finally, he looks more deeply into the source of this design, namely, the glory of God from which everything irradiates and to which everything converges as it is expressed in the letter, and in Chiara's Trinitarian-ecclesial-cosmic vision of the light and splendor of Divine Love. The author concludes that it is in this glory or splendor within the heart of the Trinity itself that divine adoption is fulfilled.

Divine Adoption

In the Letter to the Ephesians

Since it deals with God's design on humanity, it is normal that the very beginning of the Letter to the Ephesians emphasizes what is considered most important: our divine adoption. In the initial blessing and in a very condensed way, the author associates the election before creation with the final result, namely, the adoption as children through Jesus Christ:

[J]ust as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ. (Eph 1:4–5a)

Before such greatness of God's love, the letter breaks out into praises of God: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3). God blesses us with God's overabundance and we bless God in reply with praises that return to God. We should notice a movement here: God's love receives in reply the love of God's children.

This article is the second in a four-part study comparing the Letter to the Ephesians with some of Chiara Lubich's notes on her contemplative experience in 1949. The author first explores the initial blessing of divine adoption as children of God in Christ as expressed in the letter and in Chiara's Trinitarian experience of adoption in the design of God. Then he discusses how the divine design is fulfilled according

1. This article is the second in a four-part exploration entitled "Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise 1949 in the Light of the Letter to the Ephesians." The first is also being published in this issue and the third and fourth will be published in the next issue. They are considered classic publications on the mysticism of Chiara Lubich. This article was first published in *Nuova Umanit  XXXI* (2009): 499–520. It has been translated by Giovanna Czander, Dominican College, in Blauvelt, New York.

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From all eternity, God created human beings to be God's children, so they were created "toward" God. On the other hand, God never thought of human beings outside of Christ. Christ is present at the beginning and at the end of the divine design.

The author of the letter is most likely thinking about Paul's text on the adoption as children² that entails not only a privileged relationship with YHWH in light of a mission but also receiving the "Spirit of the Son," which is the very close relationship between the only-begotten Son and the Father.

The Christian experience of adoption is then lived out in the communion with Christ ("in him"). Humanity created with Christ as its goal is ultimately inserted into communion with the Father. The letter expresses it a little later with a formula that will become a classic: "Through him [that is, the church made up of the unity of Jews and Gentiles] both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18). The divine Persons are at work in the design for the good of humanity. And humanity can experience this eschatological reality already actualized in the present.

Being in the presence of the Father is actualized as church, in a unity made of love. The letter suggests it in the initial blessing: "Be holy and blameless in his sight in love" (Eph 1:4).³ Living in the presence of the Father requires being holy and blameless or immaculate. This is cultic terminology referring to an animal that is without blemish and therefore fit for sacrifice. This perfection is given "in love." In God's sight, human beings can exist only by

loving, as their ultimate way of being "made immaculate or without blemish" that stems from living in unity.

The theme of the adoption as children introduces another theme that appears shortly after in the letter: inheritance. In Paul's letters (Gal 4; Rom 8) the idea of being adopted as children is linked to the theme of their being heirs. The Letter to the Ephesians continues Paul's theme and also asserts that the Holy Spirit has been received as a down payment (Eph 1:14); it is not something borrowed that needs to be given back but a permanent advance that will conclude in our complete possession of the inheritance.

However, the author does not define what that inheritance is. In Ephesians 5:5 he identifies it with the Kingdom of God and of Christ. In the context of Ephesians 1:14, we can think that inheritance is connected to adoption, as its fulfillment. In Ephesians 1:18, inheritance is identified with God's "treasure of glory," that is, with the divine splendor manifested in God's love. In any event, this inheritance is received by those who are "holy" together (Eph 1:18), as an inheritance enjoyed with humanity made one (Eph 3:6).⁴

In Chiara's Mystical Experience

The Letter to the Ephesians confirms in its own way the centrality of the mystical experience of divine adoption made by Chiara at the very beginning of her mystical experience in 1949. Adoption

2. In fact, in the New Testament the Greek term for "adoption as children" used in Ephesians is found only in the letters that are definitely written by Paul (see Rom 8:15, 23 and 9:4; Gal 4:5).

3. I here depart from the NRSV version, to be closer to the Italian translation used by the author (Translator's comment).

4. Ephesians 1:13–14: "In him *you* also, when you had heard the word of truth, . . . were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of *our* inheritance." Note that the passage moves from "you" to "we." The "we" who receive the inheritance are no longer separated from "you"; it is a united "we" that cannot be divided because we have been joined permanently by the Holy Spirit. See Romano Penna, *Lettera agli Efesini* (Bologna: EDB, 1988).

as a child is the goal of the whole design of God for humanity—a design that includes creation and is brought about by Christ. This reality summarizes the Christian vision of humanity’s destiny of salvation. It is not by chance that Chiara’s initial experience is the experience of divine adoption: not only is it an opening to the contemplation of Paradise, but it is also the very same Paradise that will be disclosed. Here is her text:

I was about to pray to Jesus-Eucharist and say to Him: “Jesus.” But I could not. That Jesus who was in the tabernacle was also here in me, was me too, was me, identified with Him. Therefore I could not call to myself. And there I discovered coming spontaneously from my mouth the word: “Father.” And in that moment I found myself within the bosom of the Father.⁵

A little further in the text, we read:

I seemed to understand that the one who had put upon my mouth the word “Father” was the Holy Spirit. And that Jesus-Eucharist had acted truly as a bond of unity between me and Foco, because upon our two nothings only He remained.

This experience is extraordinary not because of the exceptional revelation that up to this point had not been disclosed but, paradoxically, because it is a “sensible” experience of what makes up the identity of each baptized individual, that is, the normalcy of

5. From the unpublished Paradise ’49 document: all subsequent citations that are from this document will not have footnotes.

the faith experience: being a child of God. What is described as a mystical experience in the Letter to the Ephesians and in the constant teaching of revelation is typical of God’s project understood and lived out in faith.

Consistent is the reality of Christ’s mediation not only in his historical work of salvation but also in the communion-incorporation in him that is necessary to remain in the presence of the Father. However, the originality of Chiara’s experience remains and consists in the fact that since the beginning, as a point of departure, this experience has an ecclesial dimension. This aspect of church is precisely the condition for Chiara’s entering into the bosom of the Father. The mutual “nothing” as (paschal) expression of mutual love creates, so to speak, a cell of the Body of Christ. It expresses among the faithful the one Christ who dwells within each one, as the true subject emerging from their unity.⁶

What Paul says to the Corinthians concerning the Eucharist as food of unity becomes true: “Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf” (1 Cor 10:17). The total openness lived out in the mutual “nothing” made it possible for Jesus-Eucharist to best express his potential of communion (of being Recapitulator): the two bring about the church as the Body of Christ; that is, according to Paul, in the unity achieved, they are their most authentic identity, the person of the Christ, the Risen one made visible, his emerging into existence and history.

The identification with Jesus experienced mystically was an experience of church that Chiara personally lived out. The One who makes the two into One raises each one to the adopted fullness

6. Here, Rossè makes reference to the “Pact” between Chiara and Iginio Giordani, which paved the way for the experience of 1949. See Chiara Lubich, “Paradise ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5–12.

that only the ecclesial “we” as church possesses. “It is no longer we who live; it is Christ, *truly*, who lives in us,” wrote Chiara, interpreting what Paul had said in ecclesial terms.

Chiara’s experience is closely linked to what Paul wrote to the Galatians and the Romans, which is known also to the author of the Letter to the Ephesians: “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave but God’s child, and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir” (Gal 4:6–7). The identification with the Son (through his Spirit) opens one up to “communication,” to a relationship with the Father, and therefore to the Love that constantly brings about the reality of the Son of God as self-donation.⁷

The identification with Jesus—expressed elsewhere as “having being made Son in the Son, it is impossible to communicate with anyone except the Father”—came about through “the Spirit of the Son,” and therefore by communication of the relationship that the Son has with the Father. It is an identification based on a shared nature but always respectful of the distinction thanks to the Spirit who is the Third and at the same time makes One.⁸ We should note here that the expression chosen by Chiara is not “sons in the Son” but “Son [singular] in the Son,” meaning what each one is

when, because of a life of unity, he or she acquires the richness of Christ in relationship with the Father.

As already mentioned, Paul (in the letters to the Galatians and Romans and followed by the Letter to the Ephesians) links another theme to the believer’s identity as child: the theme of inheritance. It seems to me that the same relationship exists in the mystical experience of Chiara. If her experience of Abbà expresses the fulfillment of the divine design on humanity, then this same experience also leads into the bosom of the Father, a populated divine space: “Within the Bosom of the Father we come to know all the inhabitants of heaven and we understand the works of God in us, clothing us bit by bit in the divine.” So Chiara expresses the mystical experience of entering into communion with those who populate heaven in the bosom of the Father: “My sweetest Spouse . . . show me your possessions which are mine!” In Paradise, “where each thing is seen in the Father,” Chiara moves from one reality to the next but in a way in which the previous reality is not erased but persists in the following one and in which the relationship is experienced in “the pattern of the Trinity”: unity as fullness of distinction.

Chiara often uses spousal symbolism between Christ and the church; the inheritance is synonymous with “dowry.” In a very rich text, Chiara states that the wedding between the church and Christ brings about the wedding between created and uncreated:

A soul made Jesus, who enters into the Father and weds (as Church) the Son, bears within itself the whole of creation and this is her dowry! Without this dowry, Jesus does not wed her. So Jesus gives her the whole of Paradise. And this is His dowry!

7. In a following note from 1949, Chiara adds these suggestive words: “The impossibility of communicating that I experienced here (in that fraction of a second before the ‘Abbà Father’) made me realize that being God by participation but without being love and so unable to communicate (given that God, being Love, is the highest Communion among the divine Persons) was hell.”

8. Immediately following the experience of identification with Jesus, Chiara adds, “It seemed to me that my religious life . . . should not consist so much in being turned toward Jesus, as in placing myself beside Him, our Brother.” This means to be Jesus next to Jesus-brother: unity and distinction!

Chiara suggests that the mystical experience of Paradise can be expressed with other poignant expressions such as “travelling Paradise” rather than “journeying through Paradise.” Paradise is seen not so much as a place within which one can walk and move around as it is an encounter of communion (“in the pattern of the Trinity”) with the various realities that are part of it. In the mystical vision related in Chiara’s texts, the “inheritance” promised in revelation unfolds and appears in its colorful richness.

The Design of God: Work of the Trinity

The Letter to the Ephesians and Chiara’s text have another aspect in common that has been mentioned above: the importance and role of the divine Persons in relationship to the design of God on humanity and creation. In its first few lines, the letter addresses a personal God, the Father. It moves with a sense of familiarity with the working of a God that has opened up and revealed communion as God’s manner of working on behalf of humanity. The divine design is conceived according to a Trinitarian dynamic.

In the Letter to the Ephesians

In the New Testament, there is no doubt that the Letter to the Ephesians expresses most evidently the Trinitarian reality of God. Together with the Johannine writings, the Letter to the Ephesians is the work that most contributed to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity elaborated by the Fathers of the church and the Councils. However, the letter does not explicitly address the inner mystery of God, the relationship among the three divine Persons, as takes place in Chiara’s mystical insights, which makes use of the great tradition of the church.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, multiple texts refer to the Trinity (see Eph 1:13–14; 2:18–22; 3:14–19; 4:4–6; 5:18–20), and it is plausible to think that the author understands God and God’s design in a Trinitarian way. Ephesians 1:13–14 concludes the beautiful initial blessing: the Holy Spirit brings to fulfillment the communion between the Father and those who are in Christ. For the author, the personal relationship with God is never without the ecclesial “we.” It is this “we” that has access to the Father, as stated also in Ephesians 2:18, a particularly compelling synthesis that became a formula used to refer to the divine work of salvation: “Through him [Christ] both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

Another Trinitarian expression is found in Ephesians 4:4–6, which follows and grounds the exhortation to unity in verses 1–3: the monotheistic confession of the one God becomes Trinitarian doxology, only one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father. The divine Persons, each in a unique way, contribute to the great design of unity.

Other passages from the Letter to the Ephesians, and the letter as a whole, emphasize the dynamic aspect of the Trinity: unity is not a static reality. Ephesians 2:22 makes this Trinitarian dynamic explicit: The believers are formed together in the Lord in order to become God’s dwelling in the Spirit. The church is a stable reality because it has Christ as cornerstone and the apostles and prophets as foundations. However, the church is also constantly developing toward becoming ever more the place of God’s presence (Eph 2:20–21).

The church has access to the Father and lives in God’s Presence to the measure in which it realizes its deepest identity: Christ. The

Holy Spirit works toward making this come about, as mentioned in Ephesians 2:22, by supporting and permeating the whole communion process. Even in the great blessing in chapter 1, the Holy Spirit is mentioned last as the One who brings to fulfillment the whole divine design.

In Chiara's Mystical Experience

In light of these statements of faith, Chiara's mystical experience of entering into the bosom of the Father is meaningful: It is not the result of a solitary search for God in the depths of her soul, nor of the mystical wedding of the soul with Christ as in traditional mysticism. This experience is at the same time ecclesial and Trinitarian: being *Jesus*, calling out "Abbà," put "in our mouth," Chiara explains, by the *Spirit*. This Trinitarian dimension is consistently present in Chiara's texts.

Therefore, I find great similarity between what was mentioned above from the Letter to the Ephesians and Chiara's words: "We did not yet know the Holy Spirit. He had given place to his Bride to enclose Her, then, in being manifested, as fourth in the Trinity." The Holy Spirit "encloses." Chiara's mystical experience suggests the perichoretic character of God's communion in the church. This communion can be understood as entering into the bosom of the Father (Eph = access to the Father, or "in the fullness of God," Eph 3:19) and also as the presence of God and Christ among his own (Eph = becoming a "holy temple," which means the place of God's indwelling).

In unity, we enter into God and God enters into us. In the sight of the wonders performed by God, a prayer of praise is the answer that bursts forth from the human heart. The Letter to the

Ephesians is also permeated by this prayer. The author asks the addressees to have the same attitude:

Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:18b–20).

Mystics have a similar reaction, but their praise, rather than being sung, is experienced as admiration and as a "dying for love." The "mystic" Paul comes to mind, when he is filled with awe before the divine design: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rm 11:33). In Chiara's writings, we read, "Silence, new revelations of Above would make me die." We also find a declaration of love of the "Bride": "All that is left for me is to swoon into You, to die again into your Heart, consumed by your love! My God, but why? Why so much for me? Why so much Light and so much Love?"

Divine Love

In the Letter to the Ephesians

Ten times in the letter God is called "Father." This was the name given by the early church to YHWH. Ancient Israel had certainly experienced God as Father through experiencing a close relationship, God's saving acts, love, and faithfulness. Now the God of Israel is revealed in a new way as "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:3). The solemn formula was already a traditional one, but

there is something original about it that should not be overlooked. God is revealed as Father in a unique sense, in the way in which Jesus, during his life on earth and especially in his death, lived out his sonship.

As we read in the beginning (Eph 1:2), God is also *our* Father: God is revealed as the One who opened his fatherhood to all human beings, to the believers who know that their reality as children of God is rooted in the uniqueness of the Son. In God's design, everything begins and ends in the foundational experience of the divine fatherhood. The experience of the Abbà was also the first of Chiara's mystical experiences as fulfillment of God's design.

The letter is also familiar with a cosmic divine fatherhood, which envelops everything and everyone. The prayer in Ephesians 3:14–19 addresses the “Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” The author addresses God as Father of all beings existing in the cosmos. The author is faithful to the biblical idea that God is Father of all things not because he generates, as in the ancient cosmogonies, but because “he names them,” that is, as Creator, makes them exist. Whoever and whatever exists is called by God.

Moving on to Ephesians 4:6, we find the acclamation (Eph 4:4–6) in which the Father is listed at the end, as the apex of the acclamation: “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” This formula is reminiscent of the philosophy of the times. The Greek expression *Patēr pantôn* (Father of all things) is not found elsewhere in the Bible. However, the context (Eph 4:1–3, as the exhortation to unity) suggests that such divine fatherhood is to be understood first of all as a principle of unity in the church and then extended to all the realities in the world. In the letter, the claim that God the Father is the only God is not

made to counteract the widespread polytheism of the time but refers to God as the principle of unity from whom everything irradiates and to whom everything converges.

The Father is therefore the principle and final destination of the mystery that is the great divine design on the world and on humanity. This reality is expressed also by emphasizing the *eternal* character of God's design. The letter mentions an “eternal purpose (literally: a “deliberation of the centuries,” an expression influenced by the Hebrew language) which he realized in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:11) of the “mystery of his will . . . which he purposed in Christ” (Eph 1:9), of the election of the believers in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).

In all these texts, God's plan for the church and the world emerges as something that was never conceived outside of Christ, who is the one bringing it about in history (Eph 3:11) and in the Eschaton (Eph 1:10; 2:20). The reading assumes the text of Colossians 1:16, which mentions the pre-existing Christ “in whom everything has been created.” However, the author of Ephesians goes even deeper: the action starts from the Father (who is the explicit subject of the verb in Eph 1:4: “the Father . . . who has blessed us in Christ”). Everything begins from the Father but starting from the center, which is Christ. As Bouttier notes, the gaze of the Letter to the Ephesians penetrates “into the divine origin of everything that exists, in the presence of Christ with the Father.”⁹

I would like to point out the terminology used by the author of the letter to express the divine qualities of the Father's work

9. Michel Bouttier, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Éphésiens* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991), 62.

reflected in his own Being. On the one hand, we find terms such as “grace” and “power,” and on the other hand, “wisdom” and “glory.” Eph 1:6 praises the glory of God, his divine splendor that consists in his grace, that is, in his unconditional love (in Hebrew *hesed*) toward humanity, in his self-giving as Father. Ephesians 1:19 is remarkable in that it contains terminology connected to “power.” The verse talks about the “immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might.” The author uses four terms: *dynamis* (power in itself), *energeia* (energy), *kratos* (power in action), and *ischys* (strength). These terms convey the idea of the extraordinary greatness and efficacy of the Father’s power present in the history of salvation since the beginning and exploding at the resurrection of Jesus (v 20). This is a power that is capable of death making death die and generating fullness of life.

In Ephesians 3:10, the “mystery,” that is, the great divine design, is identified with “the wisdom of God in its rich variety.” The author uses a term that appears only this time in the Bible and that literally describes wisdom as being “many-hued.” The term conveys the idea of richness, variety, things produced, and things creatively organized. In this context, the masterpiece of the many-hued wisdom of the Father is unity realized among the parts of humanity that up to this point were divided, in a sole New Human Being. This many-hued wisdom of God manifested in the church should be made known to the cosmic powers. In other words, the church is entrusted with a mission of liberation: to promote universal reconciliation, freeing human beings from hidden forces that oppress them.

The Father reveals his glory by operating through his grace, which is goodness, power, and wisdom. He is *the* “Father of glory”

(Eph 1:17): a Love that permeates the entire creation, works in salvation history, and manifests fully its strength in the resurrection of Jesus. The glory of the Father communicates a gift to his children, as the “riches of his glorious inheritance” (Eph 1:18). Believers are called to the immeasurable glory of God.

God works according to “the riches of his glory” (Eph 3:16) and this prompts a spontaneous “praise to his glory” (see Eph 3:21) in a movement involving the whole being turning toward God, who manifested Godself in all God’s splendor. The answer of the believer “is not just a duty but the irresistible thrust of a child’s heart.”¹⁰ God has revealed himself as *Divine Love* in all his actions, manifesting the greatness of his glory.

There is a particularly poignant passage about this in the letter. In a context (Eph 2:1–3) in which the author reminds readers of their past condition of death, that is, of being far from God and God’s people, Divine Love brims with all its force and splendor:

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses . . . and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4–7)

Here, one can note the piling up of terms where again the themes of overabundance and unconditional love are used to express the immeasurable riches of the divine *Agape*: mercy, grace,

10. Robert Baulès, *L’Insondable Richesse du Christ: Lectio Divina 66* (Paris: Cerf, 1971), 23.

and kindness. All this is part of God's "great love" for us. The entire divine work bears the mark of merciful and unconditional love. Whatever is at the beginning is also at the end: revealing to everyone that everything is love, centered in the Christ-event. This reality is not only present in the church but also tends toward being fulfilled in the "ages to come."

Divine Love, experienced now by the believers already co-risen with Christ reveals the plan of reconciling the whole universe:

By associating his own to the enthronement of the Messiah, God makes his plan of reconciling the whole universe to himself explode ahead of time. The goodness God uses toward us shows the goal God is pursuing in the coming ages, which seem to be the instruments God uses.¹¹

In Chiara's Writings

The Letter to the Ephesians offers a vision of faith that the author has received mostly from tradition but that he was able to explore with creativity in light of his charism. Chiara's mystical language is different. It expresses also a vision of the Father using intellectual images with symbolic value. The comparison though is still valid and is even more intriguing because Chiara's mystical experience exists on the same Trinitarian-ecclesial-cosmic level. This experience, as we have seen, begins as an experience of a child calling out "Abbà" and being introduced into the bosom of the Father. This relationship is immediately transformed into a vision:

11. Bouttier, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Ephésiens*, 105.

I had, therefore, entered the Bosom of the Father, which appeared to the eyes of my soul (but it was as if I saw it with my physical eyes) as an abyss that was immense, cosmic. And it was all gold and flame above, below, to the right and to the left.

The same vision of the Father was also recounted in different words: the Soul (Chiara and her companions) "had the clear impression of being immersed in the sun. It saw sun everywhere: beneath, above, about." And also, "In heaven, where each thing is seen in the Father, where the Sun, which is the Father, is at mid-day, everything becomes *God*: the Moon, which is Her, and the stars and first of all the Son."

While the author of the letter tends to use terms expressing overabundance and glory, Chiara's vision uses terms related to light and splendor, such as gold, flames, sun, and moon. It is a traditional theophanic phenomenon of a human being coming into contact with divine splendor. For Paul, the revelation of the Risen Lord by the Father is described as an experience of light: "God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In this text, "light" is synonymous with "glory," which is characteristic of the Father reflected onto the Risen One.

The book of Acts of the Apostles talks about Saul's encounter with Jesus as an experience involving light. The author of the book had his reasons for doing so (to distinguish the apparition to Paul from the apparitions of the Risen Jesus to the Apostles). This insistence on the theme of light is interesting especially the text in

Acts 26:12–13, “at midday . . . I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun.” Again, we find the typical ingredients—light, sun, midday—in a vision of the divine.

As in the Letter to the Ephesians, the experience of Abbà by Chiara does not stop at the level of a private and intimate relationship between child and Father but spills over into the universal Fatherhood of God. It is in this sense that the images of the “cosmic abyss” and the sun that could be seen “above, below, all around,” where each thing “is seen in the Father,” should be understood.

The claim of universal Fatherhood in Ephesians is more philosophical: “God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph 4:6). The Father as Creator transcending and enveloping everything has profound implications for understanding God’s design: creation itself as child of the Father is destined to unity, of which the Father is the origin and ultimate destination. As repeated in the letter, everything takes place “in Christ.” The Father works through a mediator, the Risen Christ, present in Him, at the origin and fulfillment of everything.

In light of this, we can examine the following text by Chiara, a text that summarizes the images related to the Father that emerge in the Letter to the Ephesians, in the doctrine of the church (especially of the Trinity), and in the typical symbolic language of mystics:

The Father has an expression of Himself outside Himself, made as it were of divergent rays, and an expression within Himself, made of rays that converge in the center, in a point that is Love: God in the infinitely small: the Nothing-All of Love! The Word.

The divergent rays are Jesus. By means of Jesus the Father reaches all his children outside Himself in whatever point they are to be found.

As bit by bit these come closer to God, walking along the will of God (being Jesus), they come closer to one another.

The convergent rays in the heart of the Sun, which is the Father, are Word of God; they are Word converging in the Word . . .

The Father says: “Love” in infinite tones and begets the Word, who is love, within Himself, the Son, and the Son as the Son is, echo of the Father, says “Love” and returns to the Father!

But all the souls who are in the Bosom of the Father (who have arrived there by walking along the external ray, being “Jesus”) respond to the echo of the Father (= respond to the Father), indeed like this the whole of Paradise is a song that rings out from every part: “Love, love, love, love, love, love.”

Later, Chiara further explains the reality of the diverging rays:

The rays that go out from the Father (from the heart of the Father), and are divergent, reach also all of creation, matter, to which they give Order, which is Love, Life, the Idea: the Word.

In the end the Ideas return by their rays to the one who generated them and, passing into the sun, from being divergent they become convergent and their meeting will form

Paradise all made from the substance of love. Of each thing there will be the Idea as it was, before creation, “*ab aeterno*,” in the Word.

And again,

I understood that from the Father those divergent rays went out when he created all things and those rays gave Order that is Life and Love and Truth; the Ideas of things were in the Word and the Father projected them outside Himself.

Now, at the end, the Father will draw back those rays that from being divergent will become convergent and they will meet in his Bosom.

Here, I cite Chiara’s notes extensively to offer a more comprehensive vision and to understand the similarities between her vision and the vision of faith in the Letter to the Ephesians.

First, we notice that everything comes from the Father and goes back to the Father. By posing the Father as the subject of the action, Beginning and End of everything, the Letter to the Ephesians also transcended the Christocentric view emphasized by the hymn in Colossians 1:15–20.

Second, the Father’s work takes place “in Christ” and “through Christ.” As in Colossians 1:15 (“He is the image of the invisible God”), Chiara’s statement “The Father has an expression of himself outside of himself” comes from Christian wisdom tradition. Chiara’s statement includes two truths: the distinction of the divine Persons within God and the Word’s mediating and revealing function (the Word as the point within the bosom of the Father

who is the heart of the Father where the rays converge and from which they diverge). Chiara’s concept goes beyond the one in Colossians and Ephesians and focuses on the intra-Trinitarian relationship between Father and Son. The latter is called “Word”¹² with regard to creation and incarnation. One finds a Johannine influence in these theological concepts.

The Word is the “Nothing-All” of Love, the Mirror of God (“Echo of the Father”). This expresses divine intimacy in its purest form. Chiara’s mystical insight becomes more explicit in another text: “The Father in the Trinity is Father by being (generating) Son and therefore *not* Father. Here we see how Being and Non-Being . . . in God coincide.” This is a bold statement, especially by scholastic theological standards, because it assumes non-being within Godself. However, it is consistent with the inner dynamics of love and with the definition of God as Love. Within the dynamics of being and non-being, Love is fully lived out in God: the Nothing manifests the Fullness of Being, Love (= the Spirit). The Nothing of the Father is identified with the loving act of generating the Son. In that act, the Father gives all of himself; in a certain sense, he “dies” so that the Son may be, and it is precisely in this act that he is fully Father, therefore God. If this were not so, at this point there would be two gods.

As for the Son, he is the “Echo of the Father,” the “Nothing-All,” the perfect transparency of the Father, Love lived out, and therefore the irradiation of the Father’s infinite riches. The “Nothing-All of Love” turns out to be the Law of the life of the three divine Persons, Law that is deeply impressed in creation, in

12. Ephesians speaks of “Christ.” Its perspective is more markedly eschatological; that of Chiara is more protological.

the relationships among things and beings. This is a theologically deep exploration of the Trinity, in line with Johannine theology (the Holy Spirit is presupposed), which the Letter to the Ephesians has not made explicit. However, it opened the way for it.

Third, the divine design, the revealed “Mystery” mediated and brought about by Christ, is described with the image of the rays, in a movement of going outward and inward that includes protology and eschatology in the one design of unity. The vision of the Letter to the Ephesians and the mystical vision of Chiara are essentially in agreement. The image of the rays is compelling but should not be misunderstood. If it is misunderstood, it could recall ideas emanating from God or the divine spark fallen onto human beings (as in Neoplatonism). In spite of what appears, Chiara’s thought remains faithful to revelation. Even if coming from the heart of God and reflected in God’s life, in his Law, creation is “nothing” or “vanity.” In the mystical understanding this does not mean that creation is a ghost, a shadow without essence, or that creation is evil (as in the Gnostic view); rather, it emphasizes most of all the radical difference between creation and God. Creation is non-God.

The mystical insight perceives in that “created nothing” also the positive mark of love infused by God into creation as an eternal link with the Creator and the openness to eschatological transformation. The image of the divergent and convergent rays also offers a dynamic way to understand that even in the diversity that expresses the “divine design” on each one, all are called to unity as “Word of God.”

As in the Letter to the Colossians, the Letter to the Ephesians speaks about *Christ*, that is, of the risen Christ as the beginning and the end, as the Recapitulator of everything. In some of

Chiara’s expressions, the Word is identified with Jesus; Chiara, in other texts, makes a distinction between the Word and Jesus. In some of her notes, the Word tends to be understood as the expression of God in relationship to creation, while Jesus, upon whom the believer is modeled, is the Word incarnated in the eschatological function of the Recapitulator who leads to the Father. Overall, Chiara’s thought emphasizes the importance of incarnation, while the resurrection event (as eschatological event) does not explicitly have the relevance it is given in contemporary theology

As in the Letter to the Ephesians, Chiara’s vision emphasizes the universal Fatherhood of God. The Father is the Beginning of everything and permeates and envelops the whole of creation. In Chiara’s writings the function of Christ as mediator becomes more explicit given the fact that creation is born and rooted in the intra-Trinitarian relationship of Father-Son. Creation is not originated outside of the Father’s fatherhood toward the Son. The Father “exudes of many beings the love which generates the Son, enveloping them into the same mystery.”¹³

The universe is generated within God, where the Father loves the Son (from “the heart” within the bosom of the Father) and communicates everything to Him. “The generating and creation work of the Father is focused first and above all on Christ. It is the one that makes him the beginning of all things.”¹⁴ As a consequence, there is a unique affinity between what is created and the Son. Creation, as Chiara underscores, has within itself the traits of the Word: “Order that is Life and Love and Truth,” that gives meaning, authenticity, and cohesion to the universe of human

13. François-Xavier Durrwell, *Il Padre* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1995), 101.

14. Durrwell, *Il Padre*, 107.

beings (see Col 1:17). Therefore, the world is adopted because it was created, because it was born from the Fatherhood of the Father. The world is “in Christ” since its origin before time (see Col 1:15; Eph 1:4). It bears forever, as its own trait, the relationship with Christ, and it is destined to become increasingly in unity a united world. This adopted mark of the universal Fatherhood of God/Creator entails an eschatological destiny of unity, revealed and inaugurated in the Christ-event.

Concerning universal Fatherhood, I would like to cite a mystical text by Chiara about a woman who lives this adopted mark so perfectly that she actually contains universal Fatherhood. It is a difficult text because it is rich, deep, and new. The vision expresses the ultimate fruit, in the Eschaton, of the design of God, of the impenetrable wisdom of God, on humanity-creation actually incarnated in Mary. Fatherhood is understood as law of Unity seen among the various beings as the fullest relationship in the pattern of, and within, the Trinity: that “all may be one *as* we are one, as you Father are in me and I in you” (Jn 17:21). Mary, as redeemed creature, lives to the fullest the “Nothing-All of Love” typical of the relationship between the Son and the Father. This is the fullest expression of God’s Fatherhood that makes the Other be in that “Nothing of Love:”

Today I am Mary, the Mother of God, as Mother of universal Fatherhood.¹⁵ I had found that all that is, is Fatherhood because all that is, is God and God is Father, is Love.

Fatherhood therefore is God.

15. This means that Mary, being Mother of God, contains universal Fatherhood. Mary’s greatness is to be *Theotōkos*. If she were not *Theotōkos*, she would not contain universal Fatherhood.

Fatherhood the Three in the Trinity.¹⁶

Fatherhood Mary in the Trinity.¹⁷ Fatherhood all that is outside the Trinity: that with which God shares *Being*.

Because all that is in Creation is God’s creature: that God who cannot give what He does not have, what He *is* not.¹⁸

Indeed in Creation all is Trinity: Trinity things in themselves, because their *Being* is Love, is Father; the Law in them is Light, is Son, is Word; the Life in them is Love, is Holy Spirit.¹⁹ The All shared with the Nothing.

And they are Trinity among themselves, because one is Father and Son of the other, and all pull together, loving one another, to the One, from which they came.

And this by means of humankind made God in Holy Communion.

The whole Creation returns, through Mary, into God. Mary is the entire Creation purified, redeemed. And as she is fourth in the Trinity; in Mary Creation is fourth, so to speak.

Mary represents humanity saved, the entire creation arrived, through the redeemed ones, in eschatological maturity. Being the

16. Each of the Three in the Trinity is Love, is the one God.

17. Mary, because already divinized, apart from God’s amazing design for her, participates in the Fatherhood of God more than any other created being.

18. This would be His intention, precisely because He is Love. But He can bring it about only if persons welcome and accept His love, and He will bring it about definitively at the end of the world.

19. Here we see things as they will be: God all in all (see 1 Cor 15:28). And, as Trinity, the Father will be better seen in the being of things, the Son in the law of them, the Holy Spirit in the life running through them. Indeed, the text says later, things “pull together, loving one another,” and so they are on the way to self-realization, to divinization.

“fourth” in the Trinity means that humanity, having become, in unity, adopted children in the Son, is perfectly inserted into the Trinitarian communion, though without losing its rich diversity or its identity as creatures. Although “divinized,” that is, located in the bosom of the Father, participating in life of the Trinity, humanity-creation becomes fourth in the Trinity.

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