

The Mystical Theology of Chiara Lubich A Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue in East Asia

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Abstract:

Chiara Lubich's spiritual experience of *kenosis* led her to be open to the presence of God in other religions. This in turn led people of other faiths to find a home in the Focolare movement. The result was a spirituality of openness to the world, which sees the way ahead as one of dialogue. In this paper, the author explores dialogue with Buddhism, particularly, Hua-yan Buddhism and the neo-Confucian philosophy of Zhu Xi. He shows how Chiara's own mystical experience can serve as a basis for dialogue with these traditions.

Keywords: ChiaraLubich, spirituality of unity, dialogue with Buddhism and Confucianism, Focolare Movement

Introduction

Chiara Lubich received a charism—a spiritual gift—that is embodied in her spirituality of unity, the Trinitarian source of which was revealed in her mystical experience referred to as Paradise '49, a period of illumination in Chiara's life that began in 1949 and extended to 1951. In the first part of this paper, I will present some reflections on the charism of Chiara's spirituality of unity as lived out in interreligious dialogue. In the second part, I will present reflections on what has been published about Chiara's mystical illuminations that I believe can become new sources for dialogue with the East Asian traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism. In the third and final section, I will present my views on how such a dialogue could contribute to a more global Catholic philosophy.

1. CHIARA LUBICH'S SPIRITUALITY AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Chiara understood that the cry of Jesus crucified, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Mt* 27:46) was intimately related to Jesus' last prayer, "May they all be one" (*Jn* 17:21). At the moment of his cry on the Cross, Jesus experienced the separation of humankind from God in order to fill that gap and reunite us together as one human family in God. His prayer for the oneness of humanity suffering from cultural, racial, political, religions, and personal divisions of all kinds found its answer in the cry of forsakenness. Chiara's spirituality is based on a spiritual union with Jesus forsaken, in a way that allows Jesus today to pour forth streams of light and love for the healing of divisions, and a unity of humankind that reflects the unity of the Trinity. Living the Trinitarian life as much as possible for human beings is the core of Chiara's spirituality. Her spirituality is based on, in the words of Piero Coda, "the existential understanding, in the light of Jesus forsaken, of the Trinitarian love between the Father and the Son in the communion of the Holy Spirit".¹

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

¹ Coda, "Introduction," in Lubich, Chiara, *Essential Writings*, xix.

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

1.1 Encounters with non-Catholic religions

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

The first major experience we had with brothers and sisters of other religious faiths was with the Bangwa, a tribe in the Cameroons, which follows a traditional religion...One day the king, the Fon, and thousands of his people were gathered in a large clearing in the middle of the forest for a celebration in which they offered us their songs and dances. All at once, I had a strong impression of God, like a huge Sun, embracing all of us, we and they, with his love. For the first time in my life, I intuited that soon we would be involved also with people of non-Christian traditions.²

The actual event that founded this dialogue in a more formal way took place in 1977 in London when Chiara was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Chiara notes:

I gave a talk and, when I was leaving the hall, the first to greet me were Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Hindus...It was clear to me that we needed to be involved not just with our own and other Churches, but also with these brothers and sisters of other faiths. So began our interreligious dialogue.³

Over the years following that event in 1977, Chiara traveled the world in dialogue with Muslims from North Africa to New York City, with Jewish leaders from Israel to Argentina, with Hindus in India to Buddhists in East Asia. In all these encounters, she modeled the way of dialogue that

²Lubich, "The Focolare Movement's Experience of Interreligious Dialogue," *Essential Writings*, 344.

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

derives from her spirituality. She followed the example of Jesus forsaken by stripping away all the riches of her own tradition in a *kenosis* of love that made herself one with all whom she met. She entered their worlds, their hearts and minds, and found brothers and sisters, fellow pilgrims in the religious life. She found herself enriched by the deep realities of other religions and would reflect on how what she found related to her personal experiences. She was fascinated with the similarities and differences while always stressing the unity that is possible even with differences. For example, here are Chiara's words on her experience in dialogue with Jewish leaders in Argentina:

First there is a desire to get to know you...and begin a relationship with you precisely as brothers and sisters...[T]his is what happens when after a long time, brothers and sisters meet again and discover they are brothers and sisters; they love one another....[C]ould it not be that the Lord is beginning to manifest his will clearly that we establish a fraternal relationship among us....and offering through our profound communion, through our working together, fresh hope to the world.⁴

As to the actual process of dialogue in Chiara's spirituality that contributes to discovering our brothers and sisters in other religions, to loving each other in fraternal relationships, to building a communion and working together to give hope to the world, Chiara writes:

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

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

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

⁴Lubich, "With our Elder Brothers," *Essential Writings*, 333-4.

It is a matter of momentarily putting aside even the most beautiful and greatest things we have: our own faith, our own convictions, in order to be “nothing” in front of the other persons, a “nothingness of love.” By doing so we put ourselves in an attitude of learning, and in reality we always do have something to learn.... We enter their world, in some way we become inculturated in them and we are enriched. This attitude enables us to contribute to making our multicultural societies become intercultural, that is, made up of cultures open to one another and in a profound dialogue of love with one another....

Real, true, heart-felt fraternity is, in fact, the fruit of a love capable of making itself dialogue, relationship, that is, a love that, far from arrogantly closing itself within its own boundaries, opens itself toward others and works together with all people of goodwill in order to build together unity and peace in the world.⁵

“Love capable of making itself dialogue!” The kind of love that Chiara sees as having this capacity is kenotic love, the love of Jesus forsaken who gave up all to become one with all in order to realize the prayer he made to his Father, “that they all be one.” It is Jesus forsaken in the heart of Chiara as her spiritual spouse who is not only a model for dialogue, but is *love making itself dialogue*. Therefore, this love can achieve the answer to Jesus’s prayer: unity. Again in Chiara’s words, the goal is “that of restoring unity to the human family, because the Holy Spirit is present and active in some way in every religion, and not just in the individual members, but also within the religious tradition itself.”⁶

1.2 *Homecoming of religions*

Persons of different religions in dialogue with the Focolare often say that the unity they find in this dialogue of life makes them better Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, etc. One Jewish leader in the United States said that the loving fellowship at a Focolare center in Rome gave her a deep sense that she was living the spirit of the Sabbath like at home. A Tibetan Buddhist leader visiting a Focolare center in Los Angeles said that he “felt at home”. A Muslim woman from the Philippines who had been

⁵Lubich, “With the World Religions,” *Essential Writings*, 338-41.

⁶Lubich, “The Focolare Movement’s Experience of Interreligious Dialogue,” *Essential Writings*, 347.

traveling for some time said with a deep sigh upon sitting down on a chair at the Chicago Focolare center, “Now I feel I am home again”. Once when I was eating dinner with a group of Hindus visiting the Focolare in Italy, there was a long silence and the elder said, “I feel the presence of God here”. All the other Hindus in the group nodded.

This kind of ‘homecoming’ experience goes both ways. In answer to a question by a Muslim as to what establishing relationships with people of other religions was like, Chiara responded:

I have always felt very comfortable! Because even if our religions are different we have much in common and this unites us....Therefore, I am happy for two reasons: because I come to know new things and enter into another’s culture; but also because I come to know brothers and sisters who are the same as me insofar as we believe in so many of the same things.⁷

When asked to say more about what she “feels” when she is with a brother or sister of another religion, Chiara responded: “I feel a great desire to relate with them as with members of the same family, to enter immediately into a fraternal relationship, to make unity....I feel that there is a pre-existing bond that was there already.”⁸

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

1.3 *Two paradigm shifts*

I think that this life of dialogue based on the charism given to Chiara for the good of the Church and the world, represents two paradigm

⁷Lubich, “With Muslims,” *Essential Writings*, 349.

⁸Lubich, “With Muslims,” *Essential Writings*, 350, 354.

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

The second paradigm shift is moving from a vision of one's religion as an enclosed home with locked doors, to an open journey where we find fellow pilgrims of different religions and cultures. It is on this path where true dialogue takes place, where we discover we have a bond that unites us as brothers and sisters, and where we are comfortable being at home with each other. In this journey, we can dialogue more deeply, share the treasures of our traditions, build a greater unity, and collaborate for peace and justice in our world. Our world is in a dark night, Chiara would say, a night involving fragmentation into different tribes, even within the same religion, that do not listen to each other, but turn to violence against each other. As John Paul II said, this is an evil with a capital 'E'. We need dialogue to open the hearts and minds of humankind to our spiritual brotherhood and sisterhood, to a life of unity and peace.

Chiara relates this experience of a cultural and religious 'dark night' to the time of St. Augustine.⁹ People from the north and the east were migrating into Europe, and the Roman Empire was falling into division and chaos. Augustine had the grace to see that the hatred and violence of that time was not the end of the world, but the birth pains of a new world. Today, the way forward into a new and more united and peaceful global culture is through dialogue. This is one reason that those of us who are academics in the Focolare have founded a new journal: *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*.¹⁰ It is a journal established by those of us who believe that

⁹ Chiara Lubich, "With World Religions," *Essential Writings*, 337.

¹⁰ See: www.Claritas-online.org

fraternal dialogue can contribute the clarity needed to build a culture of unity.

2. CHIARA LUBICH'S MYSTICAL INSIGHTS, EAST ASIAN BUDDHISM, AND CONFUCIANISM

In this section, I will discuss what I see as possible future points for dialogue between four East Asian religious and philosophical traditions and the mystical thought of Chiara Lubich. First is the tradition of emptiness as presented in Mahayana thought beginning in India and then becoming a foundation of East Asian Buddhism in general. The second is the Mahayana tradition's identity of samsara and nirvana, suffering existence and nirvanic liberation, which also was defined in India and then became foundational for Buddhism in East Asia. Third is the notion of the interpenetration and mutual indwelling of all things as developed in the Chinese Huayan tradition and considered by many to be the high point of East Asian Buddhist thought. Finally, the fourth is a set of notions presented by Zhu Xi in the Chinese Neo-Confucian tradition, which has had great influence in the rest of East Asia. In all four cases, I will point out both similarities and differences that can be foundational for future dialogue.

2.1 *Emptiness and Creation*

The Mahayana Buddhist notion of emptiness expands the Buddha's teaching of the dependent arising of the universe in such a way that all beings are interrelated, that they 'lack' or are 'empty' of the independence we attribute to them. Emptiness is the matrix, the interconnected wholeness of life found in the penetrating insight of enlightened wisdom. When wisdom penetrates emptiness, one discovers one's true self, one's Buddha-nature, and emptiness empties out in one's heart as compassion. One finds that all things are compassionately connected in a harmony from beginningless beginning to endless end.¹¹

Chiara Lubich writes about her own mystical experience of creation, of nature, during Paradise '49:

I remember that during those days, nature seemed to me to be enveloped totally by the sun; it already was physically, but it seemed to me that an even stronger sun enveloped it, saturated it, so

¹¹ See Mitchell, *Buddhism: Introducing the Buddhist Experience*, 106-110.

that the whole of nature appeared to me as being 'in love'. I saw things, rivers, plants, meadows, grass as linked to one another by a bond of love in which each one had a meaning of love with regard to the others.¹²

On earth all is in a relation of love with all: each thing with each thing. It is necessary to be Love to find the golden thread that links beings.¹³

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

When we arrived in the mountains...I felt that I could discern, because of a special grace from God, the presence of God beneath things. Because God is present, sustaining all things. Therefore, if the pine trees—which I saw—were golden by the sun, if the brooks flowed into the glimmering falls, if the daisies, other flowers and the sky were all decked in summer array, stronger than all this was the vision of a Sun beneath all creation. In a certain sense, I saw, I believe, God who supports, who upholds things. God was preparing me for what would happen. And the fact that God was beneath things meant that they were not as we see them; they were all linked to one another by love; all, so to speak, in love with one another. So, if the brook flowed into the lake, it was out of love. If the pine tree stood high next to another pine tree, it was out of love.¹⁴

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

[T]his fire that we felt—which we never felt again afterwards—was also outside of us. So we saw, I saw and then I communicated it to the others who then saw it with me—we saw that beneath the things of the world, like the meadows, the stars, the sky, the flowers, the waterfalls, there was Someone who linked them all together, a light that linked everything: it was the presence of God in things.¹⁵

¹²Lubich, "Paradise '49," *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, 1 (2012), 7.

¹³ Quoted by Slipper, "Towards an Understanding of the Human Person according to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of '49," *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, 1 (2012), 30.

¹⁴Lubich, "Unpublished Talk at Castel Gandolfo," 20 December 1999.

¹⁵Lubich, "Unpublished Talk at Castel Gandolfo," 23 February 2001.

Chiara experienced a divine ‘Sun’ or ‘Fire’, which she refers to as the love of God, that gives life to all beings through the Word of God. All things in creation exist together in an interrelatedness, in a ‘bond of love’, each being gift for the others. This interrelatedness of all things expresses in creation ‘traces’ of the Trinity. Chiara saw the cosmos as saturated with a divine love wherein all beings are linked with one another. It is very interesting that Chiara, later commenting on this experience, saw a similarity between this Trinitarian vision of creation and the Buddhist understanding of the cosmos.¹⁶

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

During those days everything contributed to creating ‘Paradise’ inside and outside of us, almost as if the elements, people and events themselves were actors in the divine drama that held our soul for a long time. It was as if one divine Wisdom ordered all things in ever new scenarios.¹⁷

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

Concerning this harmony of creation, Chiara notes that Francis of Assisi did not call the sun his brother and the water his sister out of sentimentality, but in order to capture the real unity of the universe: “And having discovered the Creator of all things who is the father of each one, he sees them all, though in different ways, related to one another”.¹⁸ Chiara also notes that from her Trinitarian vision, one sees “in this world everyone is at the center, because the law of everything is love”.¹⁹ Here, Chiara is saying that since each being is fully gift for all other beings, all beings are the center of the cosmos, the receiver of the gifts of all entities in the

¹⁶Lubich, “Unpublished Talk to the Gen,” 20 December 2003.

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

¹⁸Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 64-65.

¹⁹Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 65.

cosmos. Another way of putting this is that all beings affirm in kenotic love each being making each the center of creation.²⁰

2.2 *Suffering and peace*

Related to the Buddhist notion of emptiness is the Mahayana teaching that ‘samsara is nirvana; nirvana is samsara’. Seeing the suffering world through the perfection of wisdom discloses a nirvanic dimension. With our senses and ordinary mind, we see and experience samsara. But with enlightened wisdom, we discover a higher truth where one can live out the peace and compassion, joy and loving kindness of nirvana in one’s daily life.²¹

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

This presence [Jesus forsaken]...very soon becomes *felt*, so that throwing ourselves into a sea of suffering we discover ourselves in a sea of love, of complete joy...and the soul feels itself refilled with the Holy Spirit, who is joy, peace, serenity²²

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

that is having embraced Jesus forsaken totally, so that we found ourselves beyond pain, in love we felt like we were contemplating the immense love which God has poured out over the world...we were merged with love and shared in its light: the light of Love.²³

Chiara describes this experience as ‘a sort of Easter’, a ‘Passover’ that seemed to her to be like ‘the triumphal entry of God’ into the soul.²⁴

These two letters indicate experiences that are similar to the Buddhist view that the discovery of emptiness entails: ‘Emptiness emptying out as the Great Compassion’. In this discovery, one finds nirvana

²⁰ For a comparative essay on this aspect of Chiara’s experience of creation, see Mitchell, “The Trinity and Buddhist Cosmology,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 18 (1998), 169-180.

²¹ See Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 139-146.

²² Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, 67-68.

²³ Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, 70-71.

²⁴ Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken*, 69.

is samsara, unmovable peace is found in the sea of suffering. For Chiara, this is a kind of Passover of the mind and heart from suffering into the freedom of love, peace, and joy is due to the sea of love that is God's embracement of creation. To explain the Trinitarian source of the sea of love, like in Buddhism, Chiara and the Abba School use the philosophical categories of being and non-being. For example, Chiara says in two places:

Love is not only an attribute of God: it is his very Being. And because he is Love, God is One and Triune at the same time: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. . . . The Father generates the Son out of love; he loses himself in the Son, he lives in him; in a certain sense he makes himself 'non-being' out of love, and for this very reason, he *is*, he is Father. The Son, as echo of the Father, out of love turns to him, he loses himself in the Father, he lives in him, and in a certain sense he makes himself 'non-being' out of love; and for this very reason, he *is*, he is the Son. The Holy Spirit, since he is the mutual love between the Father and the Son, their bond of unity, in a certain sense he also makes himself 'non-being' out of love; and for this very reason, he *is*; he is the Holy Spirit. He is the 'emptiness of love' in which the Father and Son are one.

If we consider the Son in the Father, we must think of the Son as a nothingness (a nothingness of love) in order to think of God as One. And if we consider the Father in the Son, we must think of the Father as a nothingness (a nothingness of love) in order to think of God as One. There are three in the Most Holy Trinity, and yet they are One because Love is not and is at the same time. . . . [E]ach one is complete by not-being, indwelling fully in the others, in an eternal self-giving. . . . Herein lies the dynamics of life within the Trinity, which is revealed to us as unconditional, reciprocal self-giving, as mutual loving, self-emptying out of love, as total and eternal communion.²⁵

We are here reminded of another Buddhist notion that 'emptiness as non-being empties out as wondrous being'. For Chiara, it is the Trinitarian non-being of love that 'pours over the world' a sea of peace and joy in which we find wondrous being.

²⁵ Coda, "The Experience and Understanding of the Faith in God-Trinity from Saint Augustine to Chiara Lubich," *New Humanity Review*, 15 (2010), 37-8.

2.3 Mutual penetration and mutual indwelling

In the Chinese tradition of Hua-yan Buddhism, there is a profound notion concerning the relation between particular things in the world. Phenomena ‘mutually interpenetrate’ so as to be present within each other in a kind of ‘mutual containment’. This does not mean all things are physically present in other things, but the metaphor used by the Hua-yan Master, FaZang, is a mirror containing the reflections of other mirrors. This ‘mutual indwelling’ of things does not destroy their freedom. Rather the matrix of this mutual penetration is called ‘the realm of the non-obstruction between phenomena’. To discover this realm enables one to ‘enter’ and ‘identify’ oneself with all things in the universe while not obstructing freedom and personal uniqueness.²⁶

For Chiara, we have seen that her Trinitarian experience involves the mutual indwelling of the Persons of the Trinity and a reflection of that mutual indwelling among all things. This reality can be realized by those who live the life of unity by emptying themselves though a non-being of love into the lives of others. Chiara’s Trinitarian experience of mutual indwelling is only now being published by the Abba School.²⁷ For example, in a recent article, Anna Pelli, a member of the Abba School, quotes Chiara’s unpublished writing where she uses a Hua-yan-like metaphor of a mirror to explain mutual indwelling:

It happens as in those mirrors that, looking at one another, project themselves infinitely into one another and re-contain themselves through the reflection that returns... Each particular, then, even though distinct from the others, contains in itself the universal. And since the all, the universal in itself is unity, each particular in itself is ‘a harmony = a *unity*’, and in unity is composed ‘the harmony of harmonies’.²⁸

²⁶ See Mitchell, *Buddhism*, 213-219. Cf. Mitchell, “The Trinity and Buddhist Cosmology,” 169-182.

²⁷ The best source in English so far for this aspect of Chiara’s experience is an article by Slipper: “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person according to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of ’49,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, 1 (2012), 24-45.

²⁸ Pelli, “Going from the Pact to the Soul: Exploring a Metaphysical Journey,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture*, 2 (2013), 17, 20.

Pelli reflects on this statement in the following way:

[M]utual indwelling of subjects, *according to the pattern of the Trinity*...leads to re-finding oneself in a mirror-like presence of otherness, in a being-more that does not simply exceed these things...but that, while it contains them, is, at the same time, contained by them... The individual is the whole, the whole is the individuals. In other words, each one (the particular, the finite)...bears in itself the reality of the all, of the one.²⁹

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

When God created, He created all things from nothing because He created them from Himself: from nothing signifies that they did not pre-exist because He alone pre-existed...He drew them out from Himself... The Father projects them—as with divergent rays—'outside Himself', that is, in a different and new, created dimension, in which he gives them 'the Order that is Life and Love and Truth'. Therefore, in them there is the stamp of the Uncreated, of the Trinity.³⁰

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

In creating...the Father, looking at the Son, gives himself, giving his being by participation to the ideas-words (the 'words in the Word'), and in that way 'clothing' that which is not, the nothing, with his being, the very being of God. Created *things in themselves are not and remain nothing*, but they have being insofar as it is *given to them by participation*.³¹

This means that all created things are united to the Word who contains all the ideas-words united in himself. This unity with the Word that contains all

²⁹Pelli, "Going from the Pact to the Soul," 19.

³⁰ Slipper, "Towards an Understanding of the Human Person," 27.

³¹ Slipper, "Towards an Understanding of the Human Person," 28.

things as ideas and as created particulars of those ideas means that each thing contains all other things, thus the mutual indwelling of creation. Slipper notes: “A specific created thing, therefore, inasmuch as it is an expression of a word in the Word, contains the stars, the mountains, the animals, and all human beings”.³² Here we see a mutual indwelling of particulars similar to that of Hua-yan.

For Chiara, while human beings have all the characteristics of other created things in relation to the divine ideas, humans are distinct since they have a unique relation to the Word. The Word became a human person, Jesus. So, humans have the capability of expressing the whole Word-Jesus, not just the divine idea of themselves. Note here that the divine ideas in the Word provide the model for other creatures, but it is Jesus the Word who is the model for human beings and the basis for their potential relational unity.³³ Chiara says:

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

Just as where two human beings are united in the name of Jesus there is Jesus; because Jesus is the model for human beings: he is the Human Being. And it is enough to have two or more for his Idea to be present.³⁴

2.4 The Principles in Taiji and the Divine Ideas in the Word

How does all this relate to Confucianism? Here, I want to present a continuation of what has been discussed above as it relates to the philosophy of Zhu Xi, perhaps the greatest of the Neo-Confucian thinkers. Zhu Xi posits certain ‘principles’, ‘forms’, or ‘laws’ (*li*) that exist ‘above shapes’ and ‘within shapes’. Within shapes or things, these formative principles or ordering laws constitute the nature of a thing. But before they do so, these principles exist beyond the physical universe—they are eternal. They exist in ultimate reality, *Taiji*. In the creation of a thing, the formative

³² Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 29.

³³ For Chiara, this last fact, that Jesus is the basis for human mutuality-unity, is experienced as Jesus present making them one, what Chiara called Jesus in the midst.

³⁴ Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 43.

principles are immanent in the individuals, and so is *Taiji*. The latter is said to be like the whole moon shining in a lake or a drop of water. Also present in *Taiji* is the source of materiality, called *qi*, that is formed by the principles into material things. Zhu Xi sees this process as a kind of ‘condensation’ of *qi* in accordance with the eternal principles, *li*. Finally, these principles not only determine the nature of things, but also their proper relationships. They include principles of moral behavior, the root of which is humanheartedness (*ren*).

We can see similarities between Zhu Xi’s philosophy of principles (*li*) and Chiara’s mystical insights about the divine ideas. But there is another similarity. Cerini writes about Chiara’s Trinitarian vision: “[Chiara perceived] the ‘trinitarian mark of the Creator’ which is present in the entire universe in the vital interrelationships of the basic elements that constitute it”.³⁵ Cerini then provides an example of what Chiara meant by ‘basic elements’, namely, matter, order, and life.³⁶ Matter is the result of the Trinitarian Love of the Father in the creative act. The act of creation is through the Word that contains the divine ideas of God, the ‘forms’ that order and provide laws for the created material things of the cosmos. Life is the result of the matter created by the Father, the ordering forms of things found in the Son, the Word, and their unity in the life giving Holy Spirit.

For Zhu Xi, the ordering principles (*li*) and the source of matter (*qi*) are both in *Taiji*. For Chiara, matter and order do not exist apart from each other, just as the Father, who originates matter, and the Word, who orders matter, do not exist apart from each other. Life is a consequence of the unity of matter and ordering laws (forms). Here, Cerini says, even the very elements of creation are a ‘reflection’ of the unity/distinction of the Trinity. Slipper describes this understanding of the elements of creation in this way:

Creation has being because the only being is that of the divine, that comes from the source that is the Father. It has law (or form) because the ideas-words, that give the law (or form) to things, remain in the Word, that is in the mind of God. Creation has life because the relating of things to one another, that is the result of the

³⁵Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 62.

³⁶ Chiara’s words during Paradise 1949 are: “In Heaven, I understood that created nature has the stamp of the Trinity. Matter is like the Father; the Law is like the Word; Life is like the Holy Spirit.” (Unpublished)

meeting of their being with their law (or form), is sharing in the One who constitutes the eternal meeting between the source of being and the Word...that is, the Holy Spirit.³⁷

Cerini says that matter is “the mysterious expansion of the free self-giving of Trinitarian Love ‘outside’” of the Trinity in the creative act in space and time.³⁸ Matter is formed by the divine ideas in the Word of God both in what material things are and how they relate:

Being, made visible through the universe... is what Chiara highlights when she recognizes that love is the essence of all things: of the uncreated, of the created, *and* [italics mine] of the very relationships between the uncreated and the created... God-Love sustains all things by his continuous creative act. He orders and moves them in a wondrous unity that preserves distinction, not only between the uncreated and the created, but among all things themselves.³⁹

From her experience, Chiara understood that when persons realize this reality:

They discover the divine plan which God “designed for us and for our brothers and sisters, where everything falls into a splendid scheme of love”, where “a mysterious bond of love links persons and things, guides history, orders the destiny of peoples and individuals, while respecting their freedom to the full”.⁴⁰

Or in Chiara’s words from her experience of Paradise ’49:

The whole of humanity therefore—*and in humanity the cosmos* [italics mine]—[are] eternally present in the Word... which is in the bosom of the Father...the starting point and, so to say, the ultimate end of all divine creative action.⁴¹

Since the divine ideas of all creation and their relationships have eternally been present united by Love in the Word, when one is *in* unity with others, he or she discovers himself or herself to be *gift for* others in

³⁷Slipper, “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 29.

³⁸Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 62.

³⁹Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 63-4.

⁴⁰Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 65, quoting Chiara.

⁴¹Slipper “Towards an Understanding of the Human Person,” 25.

creation. He or she also discovers his or her true personhood as uniquely created by God as a distinct gift for all others. During Paradise 1949, Chiara writes:

I felt that I have been created as a gift for the person next to me and that person next to me has been created by God as a gift for me. Just as the Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father.⁴²

This realization opens one to a deeper understanding of the moral and social life to which we are called based on the love present in each person, like the seed of humanheartedness, that makes us gift for the other. This being gift of love for others is the basis for the ideal moral and social harmony Cerini calls this a 'horizontal *perichoresis*' in which true and distinctive humanhearted or compassionate personhood is discovered, refined, and perfected.

3. THE MYSTICAL THOUGHT OF CHIARA LUBICH AS A FOUNDATION FOR FUTURE INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE IN ASIA

From what has been presented, I think it is clear that there are strong similarities between the mystical insights of Chiara Lubich and both the Buddhist and Confucian traditions of East Asia. Chiara's Trinitarian experience was of an interrelatedness in nature where all things are gifts for each other is a foundation for future Buddhist-Christian dialogue. The relationship between suffering and freedom, samsara and nirvana, being and non-being is essential to both Buddhist epistemology and ontology. Chiara's mystical experience of non-being in the very heart of the Trinity as eternal Love, and its being lived out by persons in their relationships following the model of Jesus forsaken touches on these issues in Buddhism. The discovery of peace, joy, and freedom in this mystery of the Cross resonates with the identity of samsara and nirvana.

The comparison of Chiara's experience of the mutual indwelling with Hua-yan's notion of mutual penetration and containment shows how the dialogue can be enriching in both directions. Certainly the 'non-obstruction between phenomena' in the Hua-yan vision touches the

⁴²Cerini, *God Who is Love*, 52. This passage is from the text of the Paradise dated 2 September 1949.

mystery of a unity that preserves distinction and freedom. Many of the metaphors and terminology of Hua-yan can be a rich resource for Christian Trinitarian theology. And Chiara's experience of the containment of the cosmos in all things can be a resource for Buddhists as well. And finally, the dialogue with Confucianism has often stayed at the level of ethics and social thought. With the ontological insights of Chiara about the Trinitarian aspects of the creative act, namely, matter, order, and life, we have a basis for a deeper interreligious conversation about the fundamental origin of the universe.

In short, I believe that as more and more of Chiara's mystical writings are published, we will find new horizons for the Catholic Church's dialogue with the religious traditions of East Asia. And in so doing, I think that the philosophy of the Church will find categories that will make it more global. Chiara's charism in the dialogue of life has built bridges of unity between peoples around the world—bringing them together in a 'home' where all 'feel comfortable'. As her mystical work is now being published five years after her passing, in that universal home, that 'Focolare', we will have much to discuss for our mutual enrichment, understanding, and appreciation. This dialogue, I think, will contribute to a global culture of harmony, peace, and good will to all beings.

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