

# Towards an Understanding of the Human Person According to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of '49<sup>1</sup>

Callan Slipper  
Sophia Institute for Culture

*The category of the person is a pillar of Chiara Lubich's experience and thought. It is fundamental to the philosophical and theological anthropology at the basis of the culture that, in its various expressions, is in the process of developing from her inspiration. To understand this category, however, it is necessary to see the person in the context of the whole architecture of her thinking. Looking at Lubich's as yet unpublished notes of the experience of Paradise of '49, this article attempts an outline of this architecture in four sections. It begins with an overview of created reality in relation to uncreated reality, showing how all things are the creaturely expression of the Trinity of love that God*

---

1. An earlier version of this article was published as "Verso una comprensione, della persona secondo l'esperienza mistica di Chiara Lubich nel 'paradiso '49'" *Nuova Umanità* 34 (2012): 15–49.

---

Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2012)  
24–45 © 2012

*is. Then, it looks at the specific characteristic of humanity that recapitulates creation and lives its creatureliness in a personal manner. Next, it demonstrates how this specific characteristic is focused in Mary the Theotōkos, the perfect example of a human person. This leads, finally, to seeing how the individual person is fulfilled in being Jesus, that is fully realized when human persons together partake of the presence of Jesus among them.*

Chiara Lubich's mystical experience in what has come to be called the "Paradise of '49" contains a rich and complex structure of thought. In this article, I attempt to offer some first notions of an analysis of this thought insofar as it touches upon the human person. The category "person" is not addressed explicitly in Chiara's<sup>2</sup> mystical writings. The word "person" is used principally for two common meanings: for the individual human subject and (with an initial capital letter) for a divine *hypostasis*. Nonetheless, the person, meaning by that the deep reality of the human being as seen from the perspective of a philosophical, or perhaps better theological, anthropology, as it emerges in the various genres of writing used by Chiara during that period of particular illumination, is fundamental for understanding her thought. In this sense the category stands beneath and supports Chiara's discourse, implicit and necessary for its coherence, and so it can become a useful tool to assimilate and understand this discourse more fully. To give an example, it is somewhat like the categories used in Trinitarian theology that are instruments for understanding the content of biblical discourse even though they are not explicitly present in scripture itself. In the case of the person, however, the word itself

---

2. Chiara Lubich is universally known simply as "Chiara." I shall follow this practice.

is actually part of the lexicon of the original experience, and it has a sense close, even though only partially so, to its meaning in this study—something that cannot be said of *hypostasis* and *ousia* with regard to the Bible.

This means that this article’s methodology is one of an attentive reading of what the author says in a search to draw out in a systematic manner the theological structure of her thought. Chiara’s writings under consideration are not formally “theological,” but they contain concepts that have powerful theological impact. This study, therefore, creates a theological “meta-discourse.” It is not so much a parallel reflection as an exposition of the presuppositions necessary for the structure of the original discourse. And this implies that the author’s mystical language is assumed into a theological discourse that, despite the terminological closeness of the original and of its interpretation, requires hermeneutical mediation.

I think it may be helpful to start with some summary definitions of the “person” as the category emerges in Chiara’s writing. The significance of these will become clear as the exposition proceeds:

1) *In brief:*

The person is the dynamic in which a specific human being is a created word in the uncreated Word.

2) *Expanded:*

The person is the subject where the relational dynamic in which a specific human being—who is the image of God and therefore *capax Christi*, and who making him or herself nothing for love affirms him or herself—is a created word in the uncreated Word. This is exemplified in the Virgin Mary.

3) *In other words:*

The person is the capacity of a created being *actively* to welcome God into itself.

To understand the implications of these definitions, I shall begin by examining the person’s creaturely condition. Just like every other thing in the cosmos, the person is created. It is necessary, however, to distinguish what the person shares in an identical fashion with all other created things, and what instead differentiates it from them and is specifically characteristic of the person.

### Divine Creativity

The starting point of Chiara’s thought is that things before they are created, that is, before they are given existence in distinction from God, exist as ideas in the mind of God. Here she recovers, certainly in an original fashion, the ancient tradition of the divine ideas. It is not possible within the confines of an article to conduct a comparison of her thought with this rich tradition.<sup>3</sup> It should

---

3. The tradition has its roots in Plato even though the notion of God having knowledge of created things before their creation or a knowledge of things distinct from and determinative of their concrete created existence (sometimes called “exemplarism”) is not of itself necessarily Platonic: the notion has the same pattern as Platonism and indeed can use Platonism, but in Christian thinkers such exemplarism is always structured according to a Christian vision of the world. It has been very influential in Christian theology and mysticism, coming via Augustine to the Medieval period in several different versions (see Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* [London: Sheed and Ward, 1955]; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. 3 [London: Continuum, 2003]), ranging from those considered heretical, such as the thought of Duns Scotus Eriugena (see *De divisione naturae*, and also Henry Bett, *Johannes Scotus Eriugena, A Study of Medieval Philosophy* [Cambridge: Hyperion Press, 1925]; Dermot Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena: A Study of Idealism in the Middle Ages* [Cambridge: CUP, 1989]), to those of recognized doctors of the Church such as Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio (see *Commentary on the Sentences* [of

be sufficient to say that Chiara uses terminology that recalls this tradition in order to express her own mystical vision and that she does not in any direct way enter into a philosophical discussion about it. To understand her thought, however, and in agreement with this tradition, it is possible to assert that “to talk about ‘the divine ideas’ cannot be taken to refer to realities in God that are in any way distinct either from the divine essence or from one another. If there were any distinction at all, it would be a real distinction; and a real distinction cannot be admitted.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, since they are God’s ideas, the ideas are not distinct from God. Their being is the same being as God’s.

For a Christian vision such as Chiara’s, the ideas within the Trinitarian dynamic have their existence in the Word who is God’s Idea of Godself. The ideas exist in plurality within the simplicity of God<sup>5</sup> and hence ontologically they are not distinct from one

---

*Peter Lombard*] and *De scientia Christi* which formed the matrix for his later writing) or Thomas Aquinas, especially in the *Summa Theologica* q. 15 (see Gregory T. Doolan, *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes* [Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008]; Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* [Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1996]). In the following centuries the tradition was not lost and it appears for example in an English context in the thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (see “On the Divine Ideas,” *Opus Maximum*, [Huntington Library MS HM 8195]), and in the Idealism of Berkeley (see Stephen Daniel, “Berkeley’s Christian Neoplatonism, Archetypes, and Divine Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 39 [2001]: 239–58). For modern examples see also Marc A. Hight, *Idea and Ontology: An Essay in Early Modern Metaphysics of Ideas* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2008); R. Baine Harris, *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought*, Part 2 (New York: SUNY Press, 2002).

4. Frederick Copleston, p. 88.

5. As Thomas Aquinas demonstrates in the *Summa Theologica* q. 15, a. 2: “Now there cannot be an idea of any whole, unless particular ideas are had of those parts of which the whole is made; just as a builder cannot conceive the idea of a house unless he has the idea of each of its parts. So, then, it must needs be that in the divine mind there are the proper ideas of all things. . . . Now it can easily be seen how this is not repugnant

another because in the Word they are not distinct from God. They exist as ideas within the Idea, that is to say as words within the Word, *logoi* within the *Logos*.<sup>6</sup> They are the riches, the infinite shades of the beauty of the Word. Referring to these beauties, Chiara uses the expressions “ideas” and “words” in a way that is almost interchangeable, employing, however, each term to underline something in particular. Ideas indicate more their existence in the mind of God,<sup>7</sup> and words indicate their relationship of unity with the Word.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, since it must be affirmed that the Word of God and the ideas-words are one, without difference of separation,

---

to the simplicity of God, if we consider that the idea of a work is in the mind of the operator as that which is understood, and not as the image whereby he understands, that is a form that makes the intellect in act. For the form of the house in the mind of the builder, is something understood by him, to the likeness of which he forms the house in matter. Now, it is not repugnant to the simplicity of the divine mind that it understand many things; though it would be repugnant to its simplicity were His understanding to be formed by a plurality of images. Hence many ideas exist in the divine mind, as things understood by it.” <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1015.htm>> accessed 2 February 2012.

6. Maximus the Confessor says in the *Ambiguum* that before the ages God contains within Godself the *logoi* of all created things. This is a version of the doctrine of the divine ideas and God by means of these *logoi* brings from non-being to being the whole visible and invisible creation. See Torstein Tollefsen, *The Christocentric Cosmology of St. Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

7. As we have seen, speaking of the “ideas,” Chiara employs terms and a pattern of thought similar to Plato’s. Her vision is not a kind of Neoplatonism, as indeed it was not in the similar case of the Fathers of the Church, such as Augustine, who use Platonic elements to develop their own thought. According to Chiara the ideas exist in the mind of God, that is the Word, and so they are the eternal truth of things. Chiara then, like Thomas Aquinas, associates the idea with the form of a thing. The terminology is derived from the Western philosophical tradition, but in Chiara is given an original interpretation linked specifically to her mystical experience.

8. The use of the term “words” for the truth of things recalls Maximus the Confessor. It is a Christian “exemplarism” that clearly associates the ideas of things with their existence in God’s *Logos*, the eternal Word.

it must also be affirmed that, as “words in the Word,” the ideas-words are all uncreated and without the limitations of created things; hence they are eternal, each full of the beauty that is the Word.

The words are made to have existence distinct from the Word, and hence as different and diverse from the Word, by their creation. They change their ontological state. From being uncreated they pass to being created with all the limitations of creatureliness, limitations that God, precisely by being God, does not have. They have, therefore, characteristics that God in Godself does not have: their creatureliness and the qualities this brings with it, namely, finitude, temporality, incapacity, ignorance, and the possibility of suffering. This view is not pantheistic, therefore, because the difference between God and things, as indeed their absolute dependence upon God, is clear. What, in a certain sense, things give to God is the creaturely experience of limitation; that is, an experience outside God of that which God is not, but which God already knows since each thing is an idea of God.

In creation the ideas-words are projected outside God. From being One they pass to being many. Insofar as they are always divine ideas, they remain in God, one with God. But insofar as they are created, they are distinct from God and multiple. Their coming out from God, as God’s act, takes place according to God’s Trinitarian nature, as Chiara puts it:

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 (but this way of speaking is inexact as in God there is no before and after). He drew them out from Himself because in

creating them He died (of love), He died in love, He loved and therefore He created.<sup>9</sup>

As the Word, who is the Idea of the Father, is God, analogously the ideas of things, that “*ab aeterno*” are in the word, are not abstract, but they are real: word within the Word.

The Father projects them—as with divergent rays—“outside Himself,” that is, in a different and new, created dimension, in which he gives to them “the Order that is Life and Love and Truth.” Therefore, in them there is the stamp of the Uncreated, of the Trinity.<sup>10</sup>

These brief passages summarize how God creates. God’s “death” in creating, in fact, replicates the way that God lives eternally in Godself, where each Person gives himself, making himself nothing, to the others. Thus, for example, the Father who is the root of all gives himself to the Son giving him the whole of himself. If he were to keep anything for himself the Son would not be one with the Father, identical with the Father, but would be something else. Instead, giving everything, and in this sense dying because he keeps nothing for himself, the Father generates in such a way that the Son is truly another self, the perfect Idea of himself.

This dynamic is fundamental to Chiara’s thought, rooted in the understanding of the being of God as complete self-noughting,<sup>11</sup>

---

9. From Chiara Lubich’s notes. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Chiara’s writings are to these notes from 1949 that are as yet unpublished. Translations of all texts from 1949 are mine. From this point, I will at times diverge from using gender inclusive language in order to reference the word usage by Chiara in her writings from 1949.

10. A comment by Chiara at a later date on a passage from 1949.

11. The neologism “self-noughting” is used to indicate a dynamic way of taking on nothingness.

a gift of self to the other that makes the other be. That is, it is love because it empties itself, makes itself nothing for the other. We can see this illustrated in Jesus who at the climax of his earthly existence, when he is fully himself in the total gift of self—“Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8–9)—dies forsaken upon the cross (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). It is therefore a being love that is always dynamic, always in motion, because it always gives itself. And at the same time as it “makes itself the other,” noughting itself for the other and bringing the other to be, it affirms itself because it brings itself into existence in relation to the other: the Father generates the Son and is Father because without the Son the Father does not exist.

In creating, God acts in an analogous fashion. 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*. This means that creation, even though it is created and distinct from God and always dependent upon God, is, in its being, God. It is an externalized “God,” a “God” transferred outside Godself, a “God” that has become other. Certainly things are always nothing in themselves, but insofar as they are, they are constantly created by God. Their being is “God,” a “God,” so to speak, who is created and so having all the characteristics proper to creatures (finitude, temporality, incapacity, ignorance, and the possibility of suffering).

An eschatological perspective can help in understanding things more fully. For if things remain only as they are in creation, they

*express* the ideas-words, not *are* them, because in themselves they are nothing. One could say that they are only partially themselves. To be fully themselves they would have to be fully their ideas-words, and therefore fully God by participation. They require divinization. To achieve this, they have to overcome not only any kind of deviation from the idea-word they express, as is the case in human sinfulness, but in some way they must overcome their creaturely limits, even though in some way retaining them, paradoxically, in that they remain creatures. This can only come about if with their creaturely limitations they participate fully in their ideas-words, being united to the Word who contains all the ideas-words without distinctions in himself. Like this they are united with the Word and between themselves. Therefore, a return to God is implicit in their exit from God. This is to say that the “divergent rays” must become “convergent rays.” Chiara’s vision, in fact, is strongly eschatological and normally when she speaks of the divine ideas, she speaks of them in their fulfillment, when all will be returned into God, and God is all in all—that is to say when, even though always remaining creatures, their participation in the divine being is fully realized and they are fully united to their ideas and live the divine life.

## The Nature of Things

### *The Ontological Dynamic of Love*

Before their fulfillment in the *eschaton*, in their condition as created and limited (when, that is, they are a nothing only partially united to the all of God), created things reflect the being that God gives them by participation. Their way of being, while having the limitations of creation, and hence also in distinction from God,

is according to the nature of the being they participate in, and hence according to the Trinity. The basis for this can already be seen in their existence in God as words in the Word. If when they are expressed these words are each one the expression of what is eternally in the Word, the word of each expression does not lose its identity with the Word, in which it remains contained. Hence the Word contains all and in the all contains all the words that are identical with the all. 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. Thus even if a thing were to attempt to separate itself from other things, it could not do so. No thing exists without all the others. Separation can only exist as an illusion.

Consequently, things are in relationship with one another because they only exist together and, therefore, they make one another exist; that is, one thing depends upon the others, and all things depend upon each single thing and, in this way, each particular, single thing makes the other things exist. It is a gift that each thing gives to the others. In the concreteness of created existence, then, all things make effective the gift that they are in many different manners: co-operating with one another, mutually conditioning one another, dying and dissolving so that they become food or the elements from which others are constituted. In all of this, they demonstrate that they are like the Trinity: each for the other, and giving themselves they affirm themselves. Therefore, it is possible for Chiara to say:

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.

In fact, in Creation all is Trinity: Trinity the things in themselves, because their *Being* is Love, is Father; the Law in them is Light, is Son, Word; the Life in them is Love, is Holy Spirit. The All given by participation to the Nothing.

The nothingness of things, therefore, has a double sense. The first is that in itself each thing does not exist and depends radically and totally on God. It exists only because it participates in God in a Trinitarian manner, that is, in each divine Person according to what is specific to that Person. This means that the “*vestigia trinitatis*”—the “traces of the Trinity”—that can be seen impressed upon things are neither arbitrary nor metaphorical, but are the presence of God, not God in Godself but God shared outside Godself. All creation is God’s gift and is given by God’s participation precisely in the continuous creative act in which it is given distinct existence by God. 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 the form) to things, remain in the Word, that is, in the mind of God. It has life because the relating of things to one another, that is the result of the meeting of their being with their law (or form), is a sharing in the One who constitutes the eternal meeting between the source of being and the Word (who is the source’s perfect and total expression), that is, the Holy Spirit. The second sense, then, is that things are nothing also because no thing can exist in itself without all the other things. In fact, the dynamic nothingness of being, given by participation from the Father, makes things be projected one towards the other and thus all reciprocally together. The law of each thing, that is given by participation in the Word, puts each thing in a state of “being for” the other things and so they have

no meaning on their own. And the mutual relating that is the life of things, that is a participation in the Holy Spirit, necessarily requires their interdependence. In other words, it could be said that being, form, and life are each one Love and this means that nothing exists on its own, in itself and for itself, and that therefore in itself each created thing is nothing.

What is more, in creation the “dynamic nothingness,” the “being for,” and the “mutual relating,” three Loves that are a single Love and that reflect the Trinity, are affirmed in things supremely in their death, that is the moment of total self-emptying (reflecting the Father’s total gift of himself), complete giving (reflecting the deep meaning of every word in the Word), and absolute loss of self in relationship (reflecting the Holy Spirit’s being as relationship that keeps nothing for self). Seen like this, death is the climax of love. It is the moment when, since things are Love in its fullest, and hence the words pronounced in them are spoken at their fullest, things are most fully themselves. Making themselves nothing, therefore, they affirm themselves. Their nature thus reflects their origin, God who is One and Three, and it is fulfilled inasmuch as they live the dynamic of God as seen completely displayed in Jesus crucified and forsaken.

This dynamic does not tell us only something about the nature of things. It also expresses something extremely important for our understanding of the human person. Indeed, neither the specific fact of being in relationship, nor participating in the Trinity and the characteristic of having Trinitarian relationships, are definitions of what it means to be a person because they are characteristic of all things. These things are necessary to be a person because a person is a created word like all other things, but they are not sufficient. Even if, as we shall see, such things achieve their fullest

meaning in the person, they belong in the first place to ontology and the understanding of being as such and not to anthropology and the understanding of what it is to be human.

### *The Relationship Between the Ideas-Words and their Created Expressions*

This dynamic ontology of love requires a more profound exploration on one precise point: the relationship of created things to the ideas-words of which they are expressions. A fundamental notion is that the idea-word of each thing is its model. It is for this reason that the idea-word in the Eternal Word is the law or the form of a thing. The model is the universal truth of all its various created expressions:

On earth the plants do not have a head. There is no model pine tree. And yet it must exist, because the children denote their father. The model pine tree is in the Word of God, is Word of God.

At the end of time (and already now for God) the model of each pine tree, that is beneath each pine tree, will come into light and both the particular and the universal will be seen contemporaneously. Now the head is on High, and together with the other models, in the Word of God.

This, however, does not mean that the universal reality of things in the uncreated Word destroys or diminishes or in some way reduces the reality of created things. They are not illusory. God gives them reality precisely because the Word is present in the words expressed in creation:

When I see a lake of water projected by the sun upon the walls and see the play of the water upon the walls shudder according to the quivering of the real water, I think of creation.

The Father is the real sun. The Word is the real water. The lake reflected is the created. The created is nothingness clothed in the Word: it is the Word reflected. Of “being” in the created therefore there is only God. Except that, while the lake on the walls is false, in creation the Word is present and alive: “I am . . . the Life.”

In the created there is unity between God and nothingness. In the Uncreated between God and God.

As already implicit in what has been said above with regard to how things participate in the Trinity, it can be seen that when God creates, God gives Godself in a real way and therefore things, participating in God, are real. This means that the individuality of the expressions of the Word is also real. Therefore the particular is never destroyed. Indeed, at the end of time when the participation of things in God will be realized:

Above there will be the Idea and there will be the Ideas of the same Idea, therefore there will be Unity and Trinity (variety), however (as in the Trinity each is God) each of the various Ideas will have the value of the Idea: it will be God.

In a later comment, Chiara underlined the permanent value of every particular: “even the various ideas of the pine tree will be God.” And again: “I think, for example, of a bird. In paradise there will be the Idea of the bird and there will be all the various ideas.

It is likely that there will be therefore also this bird ‘clarified.’” Everything will be God. Hence things in the *eschaton*, bringing the nothing of their creatureliness, that which God does not have (is not) in Godself, to the model Idea of itself, will reach their fulfillment because the created expression will be permanently united to what it is eternally in the uncreated Word. In bringing about this return to the model, each thing will not be lost in a unity without qualifications, a kind of totalizing void, but, returning to the model Idea, the various ideas come back together in all their variety. Precisely because they are not united only to the original Idea, their return does not happen only in a vertical direction, so to speak, that is, they are not united only to the original Idea. To be united to the one model that contains the various ideas, the various expressions must be united among themselves. Among themselves, therefore, they come into a Trinitarian relationship that affirms both the particular and the unity of the particulars: “And they are Trinity among themselves, since the one is Son and Father of the other, and they all come together, loving one another in the One from whence they came.”

We can see, therefore, particular things as members of a “mystical body” of the model Idea. As in a mystical body, then, all things *together* express the model and at the same time each thing, according to its *particularity*, also expresses the model. What is fulfilled in the *eschaton* thus indicates a relation according to the pattern of a mystical body that always exists, that is, that is ongoing from the initial creative act, between the model with its various ideas and the expressions of those ideas united among themselves. Things have a profound relationship with their model because it gives them their Form and they have a profound relationship also with the various ideas of their model because these give things the

specific form with which they express the model Form. For this very reason, they have then a profound relationship also with one another because they only exist together and without all the various other expressions no single expression exists. Indeed, all the various things are expressions of the forms of their model Form, and all are necessary to express the model Form. They are all, as it were, ideas in the Idea, words in their Word that is originally within the eternal Word. This implies something important for created reality. It means that the structure of the mystical body is fundamental for nature and therefore for all created things:

The plants that we see now, for instance the pine trees, are “members” of the model pine tree [that is, various forms of the model pine tree, Chiara explains] that is in the Word and thus destined to be Word. Here too is the mystery of the Mystical Body in nature.

Clearly if human beings are also created realities, the structure of the Mystical Body, a term that obviously refers in the first instance to their relationship with Christ, is fundamental for them. In reality, as we shall see, this Mystical Body of Christ is essential for any other mystical body in nature.<sup>12</sup>

---

12. The term “mystical body” used here is an original development within a long tradition that has its roots in one of the fundamental images of the New Testament, present in the Pauline corpus, that speaks of the church. In 1 Corinthians and in Romans, the image is rooted in the Semitic notion of the “body” that indicates the reality of a being in its relation to the world. To say that the church is the *body of Christ*, therefore, means two things: the identification of the church with the person of Christ and that the church is Christ acting today in the world. In the later literature, Colossians and Ephesians, the image undergoes a development and Christ is seen as the head of the church, that is his body. The term used by Chiara has a wider sense than just the

## Human Specificity

As has already been pointed out, human beings have all the characteristics inherent in created things. They have them, however, in a way that is absolutely distinct, because of their relationship both with nature and with the Word, and in particular with the Word incarnate, Jesus. It is at this point that we can understand their nature as persons.

### *Human Beings as Expressions of the Whole of the Word*

Human beings have the capability of expressing the whole of the Word. They are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27) and reflect the Word, who is the Son, who “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15). Human beings therefore reflect the Son who is incarnate in Jesus. Hence they are like Jesus: the expression of the entire Word. Jesus, however, is the very Word itself become incarnate because in him the Word takes human nature upon itself and with that takes on creatureliness. In him the uncreated assumes the created. Jesus, thus, expresses the Word in creation because he is that same Word who becomes a creature. The personal center that acts in him is the Word itself. Human beings, instead, are only the created expressions of the Word, not the Word itself present in creation. Jesus is the Word in creation, the Form of all made temporal and spatial, while human beings reflect him. Jesus is the Word who, assuming human nature, is the fulfillment of the human capacity to express the Word, while human beings are created beings who have this capacity but they have not necessarily fulfilled it. This means that human beings find

---

relationship between Christ and the church; it includes, in a new synthesis, both the Pauline meanings. A “mystical body” has a head with which it is in such radical solidarity as to be the expression of that head in the world of history.

their model, their reality fully expressed, in Jesus: “Jesus,” Chiara writes, “is the model of humans: He is the Human Being.”

Hence human beings have a relationship with Jesus like that of the mystical body of created things with their ideas-words in the Word. The whole of humanity together and each person as an individual reflect Jesus. When human beings return to the Word, therefore, they do it because they are united to Jesus, becoming “another Son” because they participate in the Son even though they remain distinct from the Son:

Human beings, instead, because they are immortal, will return into the Word: son in the Son, but they will also be distinct from the Son as another son of God.

Having however in themselves the whole of the Word they too will be a mirror of the Universe that is in the Word.

Human beings are unique in creation. They reflect Jesus, who, being the Word incarnate, is in created form all that the Word is. For this reason, he has in himself also all the ideas contained in the Word. Every human being, however, is a particular way of being Jesus, that is, a *particular* idea of the *whole* of the Word. According to his or her specificity, then, the human person is one idea that exists in the Word. But according to his or her humanity, each person is the whole of the Word, that Word expressed in the variety of the ideas-words projected outside God into creation. Hence, the word in the Word that is the idea of each human being is the entire Word contained in a single, particular word, the whole contained in a detail. For other created things, however, almost the reverse is the case. The ideas of created things are particulars that,

through their unity in the Word, contain the whole, that is, all the other ideas to which they are united. But this is only “almost” the reverse, because the same is true of human beings in that they too are particular ideas in the Word. Therefore, they are the whole in a detail that is also a detail that contains the whole. In this way each one is a “version” of Jesus: the whole of the Word like he is, but also a particular idea of the Word expressed in creation. This is fundamental to understanding the person.

But it is necessary to underline something that gives special dignity to human beings. Their Form, their model, does not exist only in the uncreated Word as is the case with the Forms of other created things. It is the whole of the uncreated Word who has entered into that part of creation capable of receiving him, that is, human nature, because it reflects him and is made according to his wholeness, according to the entire Word. To put it another way, while the models of non-human things, their “heads,” exist in the uncreated, the head of the human Mystical Body exists in the uncreated that has become a creature like them.

And since he was always the Word, the Word made creature, Jesus, saw as the Word does. Therefore he was able to see the reality of things. He saw the created expressions and their forms in the Word (that is, in himself) including also the expression of that Form that is the wholeness of himself, human beings. As it is said (continuing a previous quotation):

At the end of time (and already now for God) the model of every pine tree, that is beneath every pine tree, will come into light and we will see at the same time the particular and the universal. Now the head is on High, and together with the other models, in the Word of God.

However, at this moment it is beneath every created thing and we do not see it but by faith, by participating in the divine life of Jesus. He sees it because He sees everything redeemed. And, as in each human being He sees the Human Being, that is Himself, the model of humanity, likewise He already sees beneath other creatures (as the pine tree for example) the Idea, the Word, that is then part (= the whole) of Himself. The human being (made in the image of God) is the whole of Himself; the plant is part of Himself (but = to Himself and it says: humanity—its God—is greater than me).

### *Human Beings as “Words in the Word”*

Every person, therefore, as has been said, contains the whole and is also a particular expression of the whole. It is obvious, indeed, that we are not all the same. Particularity is characteristic of creation. In the human person, this means that each one, even while containing the whole, is unrepeatable, unique. He or she is a specific Jesus.

Jesus, however, in his being the whole of the Word incarnate, does not cease to be uncreated even though he becomes a creature. The uniqueness of every other human person exists in Jesus because he is the very Word himself and everyone is also an idea in the Word and remains an idea in the Word, even though, inasmuch as expressed outside God in creation, each one is distinct from God. This uniqueness has profound consequences. It means that persons, in their ideas, are truly words in the Word and are to be found in the very intimacy of God. To touch a human person, therefore, is to touch the intimacy of God. Then, what happens in their creation is that this uniqueness in the heart of the Godhead comes to be expressed in the multiplicity of things. Consequently,

it must be said that persons are expressed in the nothingness that creation is in itself and, just as for anything in creation, if persons remain without the being that comes from God, they remain nothing. Thus, just as for anything in creation, they can find their fulfillment only if they are united to their Idea in God. For the human person, this means to be united to his or her model, the Word incarnate in Jesus. If instead a person is not united to Jesus, that person remains empty, remains only a creature that in itself is nothing.<sup>13</sup> If however the person returns to God, being united to his or her model, that person reaches the fullness of his or her reality. The expression is united to the Form, the created to the uncreated. Persons bring to God their creatureliness and now find that their nothing participates in the all of God. And it is precisely to make this possible that Jesus undertook his work of redemption:

In God we are in God’s greatest intimacy because each one of us is Word of God, a Word of God and, as a Word exists in the Word, so we are so much in God as to be the intimacy of God. He has seen us, sees us and will see us in the Word, in the heart of the Word, in the intimacy therefore of the Trinity. And whoever touches us touches the Word, just as whoever loves us loves the Word of God. This is why the new commandment is to love our brother or sister because that is to love the Intimacy of God, the Heart of God.

---

13. This is not propounding an exclusivist view of salvation. The living relationship indicated here is not determined by a person’s belief system, but by grace through Jesus available to all, even those who have no explicit knowledge of Jesus and lived out in love. The explicit knowledge of the Christian, indeed, would be of no use without such a living, ontological connection to Jesus.

But in every Word there is the whole of the Word as in the Word there is each Word.

Hence human beings are intimate to God *just as God is to Himself*. Human beings are God if they are child of God. They are a God by participation and *distinct* from God if they live the Life that Jesus brought. If they do not live it they are *God*, because they stay Word of God, but not distinct because they do not accept participation. They are a nothing separated from all that aspires to the all.

The sorry possibility of hell is underlined in a later observation by Chiara: “Those who go to hell stay just the same in the mind of God, but they do not participate in that reality. Hence their design, their Word is in God, is God, but they do not participate in it.” With this Chiara emphasizes that the word of each person is that person’s vocation: it is the person’s fundamental reality, his or her deepest self, but it is also what a person must reach.

My I (the Idea of me) is *ab aeterno* in the Mind of God, in the Word; hence *ab aeterno* I am loved by the Father and *ab aeterno* I hold the place that the Father has assigned to me. And I am on High, that is, my true I: Christ in me. On High I am that Word of God which God *ab aeterno* has spoken.

And I am God. Therefore, even though I may not be saved, God *ab aeterno* and for the whole of eternity would see me and delight in me as I should have been.

Therefore, the idea of a person that is in God, and the person’s “self,” the person’s “I,” coincide; they are not two different things.

There is no duality between each person and his or her idea in the Word. It is analogous to what happens in the incarnation, where there is no duality between the Word and Jesus, the “I” of the Word and the Word’s reality as something created, human. Hence human persons, even with all the characteristics and the limits of created things, if united to Jesus, are united to their “I” that is an idea in the mind of God and consequently is God. Jesus, who is in the bosom of the Father, since he is the Word that is always in the Trinity, brings them to be with himself in the bosom of the Father, united to their divine ideas. The vocation of a person, the person’s living of his or her “I,” therefore, is reached through Jesus, that is, if the person allows Jesus to live within.

This vocation is a process that begins already on this earth and ends only in the *eschaton*. It has, nonetheless, serious implications for life here and now. It means that the true personality of a person, that which is given by being a word in the Word, is Jesus who lives in the person. And if this is true, one’s true personality can be achieved only by loving, loving with the same love that can be seen in Jesus, that is a dynamic nothingness since Jesus lives in exactly the same manner as God the Trinity in God’s intra-Trinitarian relationships.<sup>14</sup> The human person, in a manner analogous to the divine dynamic nothingness—to the extent possible for a creature—affirms his or her true personality, his or her true “I,” by losing self out of love.

---

14. As we have seen, in his own way each divine Person “loses” everything: the Father by giving the whole of his being (if it were not so the Son and the Holy Spirit would not equally be God), the Son because he is the image of the Father (his being is to give himself and he gives himself back to the Father), the Holy Spirit because he keeps nothing for himself but communicates everything to the Son and from the Son to the Father (if there were a limit in what is communicated, God would no longer be one).

In strict relationship with the love that loses everything, there is another highly significant fact. If the true “I” of a person is Jesus, to be it a person can never close in on self, concentrating, as it were, only on his or her specific word without entering into relationship with other words. To do so would be a deformation. Each person, each word in the Word, must be open to all the others for an ontological reason. That is, if the person is not all the words that Jesus is, if the person is not united to the whole of Jesus, the person is not even him or herself. A relationship of unity with the others like him or herself, as for all things that must be united among themselves when they are united to their model, is necessary. One cannot become the model Form without entering into unity with all the other particular forms.

#### *Human Beings as “Creation in Miniature”*

The fact of expressing, having the power to contain, the whole of the Word, who has been expressed also in the projection outside God of the ideas-words in the Word in the entire cosmos, brings with it another aspect, already touched upon, that specifically distinguishes human beings. They recapitulate all things, both as a species, because all together they express the Word, and as individual persons because the “I” of each person is Jesus, the Word humanized, the model of each one and of the entire species. Therefore, Chiara writes: “humankind, the last thing to be created, is also the summary of the whole of creation.” This fact implies a key role for human beings in creation. If the entire creation is summed up in human beings, then what happens to them affects the whole of creation. Through them, hence, the whole cosmos can be brought into God. In other words, by means of them the created expressions can be reunited to their uncreated ideas. Again,

Chiara writes: “Humankind therefore is creation and, redeeming it, all is redeemed.” The Mystical Body of human beings with Jesus transforms and fulfills the mystical bodies of nature.

What happens here is the fulfillment of what is expressed in creation. When the Word is expressed in creation both as the initial act and as the continuous creative act, what takes place is similar to the incarnation, although creation is not incarnation because the Word in creation does not assume created nature. It is similar in a sense because the contents of the Word, the words in the Word, are expressed outside the Word, given being by the Father. Things pass from being uncreated to being created, and in this sense they are the Word “poured out” into creation. This “similarity to the incarnation,” however, is only the beginning of the process. In the end, by means of the role of human beings, made possible by the work of the Word incarnate in Jesus, all created things will be reunited to their ideas in the Word and, in that moment, it will be possible to speak in a stronger way of a “similarity to the incarnation” in nature. Things will remain created and yet they will be fully God because, as has already been said, God will be all in all because things will have a threefold participation in God: in God’s unlimitedness and hence in the infinity of God’s being (patterned on the Father); in their idea-word in the Word, that each is in unity with all the ideas-words in the Word (patterned on the Son); and in the life of love without restrictions (patterned on the Holy Spirit). Human beings are in a key position because, as expressions of the whole of the Word, they contain all that is created and they express also all that is uncreated. In them too, as in the whole of creation, there is something similar to the incarnation, despite the clear difference, because they are the expression of the entire Word. Consequently, they give the Word a suitable place to

become incarnate because humanity is that part of creation that, made in the image of God, already expresses God in a full way—they also sum up all creation. Humankind becomes the point of encounter and transformation for all creation, and humankind's becoming Jesus makes all become Jesus:

Jesus redeems humankind and humankind redeems nature, gives nature the stamp, the personality of Christ; and it is right, because nature is the incarnation of the Word, is the Word incarnate.<sup>15</sup> The Word. However, since humankind, the last thing to be created, is also the summary of the whole of creation (and made in the image of God precisely because Word incarnate),<sup>16</sup> the Word was able to become incarnate only as a human being who, even though a part of creation, is also the whole of creation.

### *Human Beings as "In the Image of God"*

The specific nature of human beings could be summarized, therefore, with the biblical term "image of God." Being this they are, like their model Jesus, the expression of the whole of the Word and of the entire creation. For the person, however, being the image of God brings with it other important implications in relation to other created things. These implications can perhaps be seen with greater clarity if we recognize that, despite their deep

15. "Here I see nature in its final fulfillment, when God will be all in all and hence [when] it will be divinized, that is, Christified and brought by Christ into the bosom of the Father." (A comment by Chiara upon this passage)

16. "Humankind is the incarnation, in a manner of speaking, of the Word who wanted it to be 'the image of God' (see Genesis 1:26–27), and so humankind, created last, finds itself at the peak of creation and is its summary." (A comment by Chiara upon this passage)

nature, human beings unfortunately do not necessarily live according to their nature. They can, and in the cruelest of ways often do, go against their human-divine model Jesus.

This means that the action of God within creation is not simply to bring all back fully into God, but it is also redemption, that is, a remedy for sin. It is a therapy that heals that way of acting and all its effects, the sin that clings to humanity like an ingrained stain, that goes against God. It is fundamental. Being made in the image of God, persons are created free. For the human person, this means that, to be truly free, he or she must have the capacity not to be completely circumscribed by his or her nature. That is, at least so far as the will is concerned, the nature of the person is not to be determined by that nature. Hence, to be free the person must be able, at least in a moral sense, to go *beyond* him or herself. This same liberty has, in fact, two faces: to go *against* self in a negative sense by sinning, or to *rise above* self in loving. In God, the uncreated, freedom is different. God's uncreated nature is absolute freedom. Whatever God does, and God can do anything, is always the exercise of this absolute freedom. Hence, God always acts according to God's nature. God's freedom is completely exercised in God's decision to be love. For a created person, instead, the possibility of choice, falling below or rising above self, gives the possibility of loving actively, not only passively as it is for the rest of creation. In the cosmos, things are in a relation of love, but they cannot choose. Human beings, on the other hand, can choose and hence can love actively, of their own volition. Since they are able to sin, they can love truly, fully. Thus they can affirm that they have been made in the image of God who is love (1 John 4:8, 16).

The return of creation to God takes place through that part of creation capable of truly loving like God because it loves freely. As

human beings made in God's image, by means of grace, persons renounce sin and live the ontological nothingness of created reality in itself *as a gift of love*. That is, they live the nothingness of their dependence upon the uncreated as a total, faithful openness of God and the nothingness of their interdependence with others as a relationship in which they give themselves, and so, through participation, become God. But it is all gift, all God's work. As Chiara writes:

God in it [in the human being] shares Himself directly, placing the soul in it as His image and placing it upon earth for the adventure of becoming God, returning to the Father who created it, by participating in the divine life, by means of grace.

To have the freedom that can become love, however, it is necessary that the individual person be a self-aware subject with sufficient consciousness at least to make the choice to love. Here too there is a difference between humanity and the rest of creation. Things including animals are not conscious, at least in this way. For this reason human beings are distinguished from the cosmos. They are the part of it that has become aware of itself and therefore, being free, they are distinguished also from God and so they can, standing before God, speak to God as his personal interlocutor. They address themselves to God as persons: free, capable of choosing, capable of being love.

## Mary

Being the image of God, then, means that human persons, when they love, can fulfill their vocation to be united to Jesus and, in

him, with all the ideas in the model Idea. Such a vocation, obviously, is exalted and exacting. It demands everything. It can be seen lived in an exemplary way in the Virgin Mary. She becomes, thereby, a light on what the person is, in a certain sense, the definition of the person.

### *The Exemplar*

Mary's characteristic is total openness to the Word: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Indeed, she is so open to the Word as to be all word, expression of the Word lived out:

Then I looked above me, where there was a beautiful statue of the Mother, and I understood that She was only Word of God and I saw Her beautiful beyond all telling: all clothed in the Word of God that is the Beauty of the Father, the secret custodian of the *Spirit within*.

She adheres with the whole of her being to the Word. She chooses, therefore, from the depths of her being, and therefore is free and aware. The act of her freedom and awareness is manifested in placing her center outside herself. In Chiara's words: "She is a living Gospel because Jesus *makes Her like that*. She is only a perennial 'fiat' to a will that is outside Herself." In Mary, therefore, can be seen a person who, so to speak, has an ex-centric center, in the will of another—God; just as, in fact, can be seen in Jesus. And given that the openness to this center outside herself takes on the whole of her person, it touches also her bodily dimension, that dimension that she shares also with her Son, Jesus. As Chiara says: "The Gospel is Jesus and Jesus is the Word in the bodiliness of Mary."

Mary, therefore, in the whole of her being is the full and unimpeded expression of the Form of a human being. She lives creaturely reality to the full and as a human being. She lives it actively, which is to say that she welcomes her being that comes from the Father; consciously follows her Form that she finds in the Word humanized, her Son Jesus; and lives the love that comes from the Holy Spirit. She can be seen, therefore, as the most successful example of a creature, where the Trinity expresses itself without any impediment.

And just as every human person should live as the Son of God, according to the model (and by the grace) of Jesus, to be fully the “image of God,” Mary is the Daughter of God:

I saw Her—informed by Her Son in how to love the Father—loved by the Father as the Son: the Daughter par excellence. *The Daughter of God—the Woman of Love!*<sup>17</sup>  
How beautiful she is!

Mary is like this because right from the beginning of her created existence she was prepared for what she would do in her life. Her living her creaturely reality with such intensity and completeness is a result of her being full of the presence of God and in no way resists him. In other words, she is all-holy, without sin:

In fact Mary was conceived without sin because there was no lack in Her of the presence of God, right from her

---

17. “Seeing Mary in this way is exceedingly beautiful: the Woman of Love, because the daughter of a Father-Love.” (A comment by Chiara upon this passage)

conception, the presence of the Holy Spirit, that then grew making her: Mother of Jesus and Mother of the Mystical Body of Jesus in Her desolation.

Mary shows the human person, therefore, as a creaturely reality full of God, with that fullness, among all beings that exist, proper to human beings because they are made in the image of God, creatures capable of being other Christ. While it cannot but be recognized that the rest of humanity struggles and sometimes fails in such a vocation, it is possible to see how Mary, even in all the struggles of her own life, being another Jesus and so expressing in herself the whole of the Word and summarizing creation, expresses the entire human race in a positive sense. She too has Jesus as her Form, but she lives him perfectly, in a complete way. Chiara says:

Today I understood that the whole of humanity flowers in Mary. Mary is the Flower of humanity. She, the Immaculate, is the flower of the Maculate.

It could not but be thus: according to the Trinity the climax<sup>18</sup> of anything at all is its opposite. The triumph of a green plant is the flower of a different color. As the peak of Love is Truth.

Sinful humanity could not but flower in Mary, the all-beautiful!

---

18. “That is, according to the law of the Trinity.” (A comment by Chiara upon this passage)

In Chiara's observation on this passage, that points to the law of the Trinity, there is a useful principle for understanding how Mary can be the expression of the whole of humanity even though, because of her holiness, she is different from other human creatures. In the Trinity, the Father expresses himself completely and distinctly from himself in the Son, who is the complete Idea of himself. Therefore, the Son is equal to the Father and contains him while he is also his contrary, since he is the Son who receives everything and not the Father who gives everything. Mary, expressed by humanity, is in a similar relationship. To use a metaphor, she is like a mirror image that is the reverse expression of its original. She, therefore, is the "reversal" of sinful humanity of which she is the all-holy summary and the crown.

This aspect, because humanity is also the summary and crown of creation, calls attention to something important about Mary. She, like all human beings (individually or together), is the summary and crown of the whole cosmos. Thus Mary, in Chiara's words, "is the entire Creation purified, redeemed." She is the person in the state of perfection.

Moreover, Mary, being the whole of the Word of God, participates fully in Jesus, the Word incarnate. For this reason she is the perfect person. Therefore in her, through participation, there is the whole of the uncreated. As Chiara says: "Mary does not sum up in Herself only the Creation, but the created universe and the uncreated." From Mary, then, Jesus is born; hence what is seen in her as a result of her total welcome of the Word is accomplished also in her physical maternity. She is the *Theotokos*. She contains God and by this becoming small out of love on the part of God, she even seems bigger than God. Chiara affirms this in a letter:

Yes, it is true that She is contained by the Trinity, but yesterday I saw her, because the Son showed her like this to me, as containing the whole of Heaven in Herself.

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.

This means that elsewhere Chiara can also affirm:

In Her is the entire Trinity with the Creation It contains. Mary contains Herself in Herself though the Trinity.

It is like those mirrors that, facing one another, are infinitely projected one in the other and that contain one another again and again because of the reflection that returns.

All of this, however, is always the outworking of grace and takes place "because of a retroactive action of the Redemption." It is only by means of grace that Jesus has made Mary what she is. And since Mary is the person in the state of perfection, it means that to be person successfully as she is, everyone must reach it through the same grace given by Jesus. In this, Mary, since she is the exemplar of a perfect person, indicates, however, something more: the extremely high vocation of all persons to be so divinized as to contain the God in whom they are contained.

### *The Desolate*

All the themes of what it is to be a person that can be found in Mary can be seen especially clearly at the climax of her life, when

she stood desolate at the foot of her Son's cross. Here Jesus takes away from her the greatness of being his mother, indicating John instead of himself as her son (John 19: 26–27). What it means to be a person according to Mary's example is summed up in this loss:

But to be Mary it is necessary to be Jesus Forsaken<sup>19</sup> or also the Virgin in her desolation: offer oneself to suffer the loss of the Son: rejoice to be without: Peace, Happiness, Health . . . all that she is: feel Oneself to be Her desolate . . .

“ . . . because you are desolate.” That is, to be *only*: Word of God. Guard in oneself only the Word of God.

“ . . . and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus . . . ”  
Generate in oneself (being made holy for the others' sake = living the Word that generates Christ in the whole of the Soul) *Jesus* for oneself and for other souls.

We see here that since Mary in her desolation loses everything, she is absolutely and only the Word, as Chiara observed commenting on this passage: “There is a strong link between the Desolate One and the Word, because truly if we are the Word of God we are no longer ourselves.”<sup>20</sup> In an exemplary way, therefore, Mary Desolate adheres to God and so shows herself to be completely free because she carries out, even in the most extreme circumstances, her conscious choice to follow God. In her total making

19. “To be Mary” means to live according to the pattern of Mary and “to be Jesus Forsaken” means to live according to the pattern of Jesus' self-emptying upon the cross. The language of “being” is a language of participation that points to how the origin of the ability to live in this way is in the divine action in the life of Jesus.

20. This, of course, follows the Gospel logic that by losing your life you find it, see Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25. To lose yourself is to become yourself.

herself nothing out of love, therefore, she is truly the image of God.

According to Chiara, it is precisely this self-noughting that makes Mary able to participate in the action of the dying Jesus. Paradoxically, it is a participation by means of its opposite. In reality, Jesus excludes Mary from his work when he takes her divine maternity from her: “She was excluded by the Son who alone offered Himself for all including Her.” But in that moment, living out her total self-noughting and letting Jesus enter the absolute self-noughting of his God-forsakenness where “he had neither Mother, nor Father. He was nothing born of nothing,” Mary was also included for the reason that she was excluded: “And at the same time she participated in it with infinite intensity because she was made our Mother precisely there.” It was the fulfillment of her role, the full expression of her being *Theotōkos*: “Now was divine Maternity Hers, hence she was Mother not humanly, but *divinely*, infinitely. And therefore producing God. Because she is the *divine Mother* she can be the Mother of *all* of us.”<sup>21</sup> Making herself nothing, she affirms herself just as God does; that is, she replicates in herself, in the way a creature can (and as we have also seen is the Trinitarian fulfillment of every created thing), the way of being of each of the three divine Persons, each according to the specific distinctions of his Personhood. Becoming nothing she becomes fully her specific word in the Word; she fulfills God's plan for her.

And here, as a person, she enters into Trinitarian relationships, where each one lives at times according to the pattern of the Father

21. To avoid confusion, it may be a help to point out that Chiara is not saying that Mary is a goddess. She participates in divinity and so, in God and through God, she can give birth to God. The full realization of this participation in divinity is when her giving birth becomes limitless.

and at times according to the pattern of the Son. This is evident because as a result of her actively living the word expressed by God in her she has relationships such that those who have given life to her, that is, the whole of humanity (of which she is the summary, the flower) are given life by her:

... John came in and with him Humanity. Into the most pure womb of Mary, from whence came the Son of God, re-enter the sons of men to become divinized by means of immaculatization in Mary. She is the Door of Heaven. We are not Christians if we are not Marian. We are not divinized if we are not immaculate. We do not go to Jesus if not via Mary. We do not possess the Forsaken One if not by means of the Desolate One.<sup>22</sup>

The topic of immaculatization deserves a much deeper study than is possible in this article. In this context, it emphasizes how Mary in Jesus and by means of Jesus has a role according to the pattern of the Father with regard to humanity. In order to make a human being capable of living like her, that is, capable *without putting obstacles in its way* of receiving the Word (both in the sense of the teaching of Scripture and of the Eternal Word in God), she makes the human being capable of “generating” Jesus in him or herself, and also in others. In Mary Desolate, therefore, can be seen the reality of the person intensified and emphasized. She (1) is a creature, and so a word in the Word; (2) is human, and so

---

22. Another note of caution may be necessary here. Chiara does not mean that anyone without an explicit knowledge or relationship with Mary cannot have a transformative relationship with God. She is indicating the role of Mary, whether we are aware of it or not, in helping human beings come to fulfillment in God.

summing up the whole of creation and expressing the whole of the Word; (3) lives her “I” to perfection, choosing absolutely to live in union with the Word humanized, her Son, Jesus; and (4) has as a person, Trinitarian relationships with other persons and with the whole of creation.

### Human-Divine Fulfillment

Living as a person and being in relationship are not independent things. The person does not exist outside of relationships and relationships are the place where persons find their fulfillment as persons. This comes about for two reasons, one functional and the other ontological. Functionally, relationships with others give persons the opportunity for self-noughting. They almost oblige a person to come out of self and, if this happens as the result of a real choice, a person can do this by living the Word that is always love. In that way, in love, he or she lives Jesus and thus lives as a person.

Ontologically, if persons are expressions of the model Idea that is Jesus, they must be open one to another in order to be in accordance with the reality of their being. If they were to close themselves in their own word, that word itself would lose its meaning. Therefore, if two persons really meet, that is to say if they meet in the mutual self-noughting of love, their words expressed in creation open up to one another. But this opening up is not simply a matter of the words involved, as it were, in the immediate relationship. In fact, it is an opening up to all of the words because in the unity of the Word each word contains all words. The particular contains the universal, or to say the same thing differently, each human being is an expression of the model, Jesus, so that in his or her particularity is contained also all the other particularities:

We need to enlarge it [our own heart] to the measure of the Heart of Jesus and love everyone. And as one Sacred Host, from among the billions of Hosts on the earth, is enough to nourish us with God, so one brother or sister (the one whom God's will puts next to us) is enough to give us communion with humanity, that is the mystical Jesus.

In this mutual opening, we open ourselves to the whole of the Word, and thus at the same time to God and the whole of humanity contained in the Word. Such a relationship is an opening, therefore, to the One who is God and is the model of all humanity, that is, the Word humanized, God fully present in creation, Jesus. Human persons in their relating to each other and by means of their relating, find themselves thus relating to Jesus who is not only in each of them, but goes beyond them, enfolds and transcends them and so is among them. In this moment, they are fulfilled inasmuch as they are words in the Word, because now they are united to all the other words and to their Model Word. They are truly themselves, truly persons. It is something that happens in Jesus, and only by means of a relationship with other human persons. In fact, it could be said that persons become truly persons by means of persons.

This experience is deeply rooted in creaturely being. In the whole of creation, any created word, if united to the other words of its model-Word, discovers its full reality because it comes into contact with its head, that is in the Word, who brings with him all the words in the Word. But for human beings there is a further fundamental element. They are subjects made in the image of God; hence they can, indeed they must, choose: their task is to be united among themselves by choice of will. Persons can, must, love

actively, not merely passively as other things do, and in their loving one another they do what things of their own power cannot: they return already in this present time to their model.

Other things do not have this relationship with their models, because they do not have the possibility in themselves to be united, in the sense that they are not capable of the full, active love characteristic of persons. Furthermore, they do not have their model in creation because their ideas remain in the Word. Nonetheless, since Jesus is the Word incarnate, these ideas-models are all present in him, and therefore are in him when he is present as "Third" in the midst of human persons. Consequently Chiara can say:

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; and this 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.

The fir trees are united by the idea of the fir tree and not by Jesus. However, in the final analysis, they are united in Jesus, by being united in the idea of the fir tree that is in the Word. But, since Jesus is the Word Incarnate and contains in his Flesh the whole of nature, the fir trees are united in Jesus. "For him all things were made," to form him.

In the experience of being united with Jesus in the midst, therefore, persons as individual human beings find themselves made complete because they pass from living united to Jesus in their particularity to being united to the model Ideal that contains all

particularities, the entire Jesus. Living Jesus in one's personal particularity, in total love for others, is already a way of being Jesus. Yet to be Jesus fully, it is necessary to pass from being in the particularity of a person who loves to having Jesus among persons who love one another:

Look therefore, for there to be [Jesus among us] it is necessary to love like this. But you know that to love like this means being "other Jesus."<sup>23</sup> Now for Him to be among us it is necessary to be him beforehand.

Thus, if a person loves, making self nothing out of love like Jesus, loving another person who, as a particular expression of the model Jesus, contains all the particular ideas, and is then loved back with the same quality of love, both persons find themselves together beyond themselves in Jesus entire. We pass, therefore, from being *in contact* by means of another single person with all his or her particularity, with all the ideas-words of the Word in that single person, to *being united* to all these particular ideas, to all the ideas-words that the Word contains. That is, we go from loving Jesus (who contains everything) in the other, to together being Jesus (who gives to all the all he contains).

Therefore, it is possible already in this world and in history to have an experience of paradise, where the human being finds realization because he or she experiences the divine who is, in Jesus, fully human and fully divine. In fact, in this way relationships between persons are lived at the highest level even, for example, with

---

23. "It is Jesus, in fact, who loves with the measure of death." (A comment by Chiara upon this passage)

regard to human feelings because all understand one another and each loves and feels loved. It is a mysticism in the social realm that satisfies the created person in his or her individuality because he or she discovers that Trinitarian relationships are not simply about imitating the Trinity, but are also a true participation in the life of the Trinity:

When we are united and He is there, then we are no longer two but *one*. In fact in what I say it is not me saying it, but I, Jesus and you in me. And when you speak it is not you, but you, Jesus and I in you. We are a single Jesus and also distinct: I (with you in me and Jesus), you (with me in you and Jesus), Jesus among us in whom we are I and you.

And His presence is mystical among us.

And He is in the Father and so we two in Him are in the Father and participate in the Trinitarian Life.

## Conclusion

The person is a vocation. Ontology demands life. The deeper being of a member of the human race is in agony until it becomes also a being that is lived. We could say that the God who is already present in a person because of his or her existence must fill every part of that person's existence and make it full of God. It is a process. We, here and now, are at the beginning of the *eschaton*, not at its fulfillment. The pathway towards its realization, however, is clear. Each one, to fulfill the word of which he or she is the created expression, must live the love that is self-nourishing. The example of this is Mary. And no one ought or, better, can live loving self-nourishing alone. We can reach fullness only through other persons with whom together we can be the Model Word, Jesus.

In all of this we cannot negate the necessity of the work of Jesus. He is the focal point who makes everything work. He with his grace makes divinization possible. He does this above all with his full manifestation of himself in his Forsakenness on the cross. In fact, behind every element that has emerged as essential to understanding the person, there is a secret. It is this: Jesus forsaken, the revelation and the fundamental work of Jesus. He is the One who explains the life of God, and hence the being that the Father gives, the Idea that the Word is and the life that the Spirit lives. He, therefore, is the secret of things that in their nothingness participate in the presence of God the Trinity. He is also the internal structure of the relationships that things live with one another. And he, who makes the most radical choice of love possible, and so has the most absolute freedom of an unconditional love, is the incomparable image of God. He therefore is the reality of the person. But he is also the liberator of the person, because he is the reason why persons can be fulfilled, going beyond any limitation. He, then, is the explanation and the cause of the successful or perfect example of a person, namely, Mary. His Forsakenness is replicated in her Desolation and by a retroactive grace his Forsakenness makes possible Mary's existence as the one who has always been all-holy. He is the love necessary for his presence as the Risen One to be among persons. Jesus forsaken is the key that opens Chiara's entire thought.

In reality, though, it would be interesting to look in still more detail at each element necessary to understand the person: the divine creativity, the nature of things in their ontological dynamic of love that expresses the ideas of the Word, and the specificity of what it is to be human, as the expression of the whole of the Word and the summary of the whole of the cosmos, according to

which human beings live their creatureliness in the image of God. It would be interesting, also, to look still more closely at Mary and at Jesus in the midst. But I hope that what has been said may have served to show, so far as the notion of the person is concerned, the architecture of thought that undergirds Chiara's mystical experience. Even though she does not use the term "person" in the way it has been explained, the category is fundamental for her vision of what it is to be human.

To grasp what Chiara proposes, therefore, we can never get away from the person seen as the human way of living the Word expressed, a word in the Word, in created terms. It is a way that is always a relational and Trinitarian dynamic, as for all things, but that is a dynamic of beings that are unique and unrepeatable, and that by making themselves nothing affirm themselves. It is a way in which persons as well as all things are fulfilled by being reunited to their Model Idea. For persons, this is Jesus, and it is lived most fully when, each person being Jesus, all are together Jesus and in the midst of them is Jesus.

*Callan Slipper is an Anglican priest living in Ealing Focolare in England. His doctorate is from Lancaster University with focus on philosophy of religion and the comparative study of cognitive aspects of mystical experience. He has been Editor of New City Publishing in England, and is now on the faculty of the Sophia Institute for Culture and is a member of the Abba School. He sits on national ecumenical committees of the Church of England, is involved in interreligious dialogue, and has published articles on theology and spirituality, the latest being "The Apostolic Constitution 'Anglicanorum coetibus' of Pope Benedict XVI from an Anglican Perspective" (2010).*