

# Transferring Self to Other

## Radicalizing Human Being

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*This article begins by indicating recent developments in philosophical anthropology that provide background for understanding some key elements in the view of what it is to be human that underlie Chiara Lubich's text "Look at all the Flowers." The author begins by looking at self-transcendence and notes the shift from previous instances of spirituality that comes about as a result of Chiara Lubich's context of mutuality, of her reciprocal transfer of self to the other. He then looks at the metaphysical structure that supports this way of being, and explores three core categories: transcendence, relationality, and corporeality. These underpin relationships according to the pattern of the Trinity that take people in relationship beyond themselves individually, and, at the same time, beyond their mutual relatedness. This is a different way of being human that also opens up the possibility of a different way of knowing.*

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It is always helpful to avoid over generalization. Nonetheless this should not discourage us from considering the various contemporary analyses of innovative cultural prospects characterized, at least in the West, by a recovery of the original stimuli for philosophical thinking. After centuries of neglect, when there was a monopoly of *logos* understood as rational activity detached from life itself, philosophical discourse speaks again about love or *eros*. Philosophy, it is said, must be again the love of wisdom. It must rediscover, therefore, its creative impulse in love. It comes as no surprise, then, to see expressions summarizing contemporary cultural sensibility as being rather like “a mystical shift in philosophy” or “a theological shift in phenomenology.”<sup>1</sup>

This is not a passing phase. It comes from processes of thought over the years that indicates something of the complexity of cultural shifts. For example, we would not be able to speak of a theological or mystical shift in phenomenology without considering the thought of the later Heidegger. This perspective introduces the appeal to transcendence, to “the event” (*Ereignis*), to love, to the body, to life, to poetical thinking and to the divine.<sup>2</sup>

Another characteristic of this new way of facing the human can be seen in the ontological hermeneutics of religious experience. Here too we can recall Heidegger, particularly in his study of the philosophy of religion at Freiburg in the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> At the same time

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1. L. A. Castrillón, “El posthumanismo del amor: El giro místico de la fenomenología,” *Logos* (2012): 68, 73.

2. In these perspectives it is certainly possible to identify some ambiguities or lack of grounding from the point of view of the Christian event as understood by theological thought.

3. Martin Heidegger, *Phänomenologie des religiösen lebens, einleitung in die phänomenologie der religion*; Spanish translation by Jorge Ustescu, *Introducción a la fenomenología de la religion* (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 2005); Italian translation by G. Gurisatti,

we can recall later developments, closer to the logic of Christian revelation and its theological understanding, in the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur of France and Luigi Pareyson of Turin.<sup>4</sup> In Heidegger's view Christian theology thought of God in "ontic" terms while the next step would be to think "ontologically"—but in this, Heidegger says, poets and mystics see more clearly.<sup>5</sup>

The influence of Meister Eckhart's negative and mystical theology on Heidegger cannot be ignored here. As Silvana Filippi affirms:

[I]t doesn't seem difficult to suppose that such characteristic terms of Eckartian language as *Wesen* (essence), *Grund* (basis), *Abgrund* (abyss that is bottomless or without foundation), *Gelassenheit* (abandonment), *Abgeschiedenheit* (separation, distancing) have some meaning in relation to the same words that appear in the later Heidegger and whose meaning is not of merely secondary importance.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, in conversation with a group of theologians in Marburg, Heidegger is said to have affirmed that "being" relates to "God" as "thought" relates to "faith."<sup>7</sup> Certainly this relates to Heidegger's

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*Fenomenologia della vita religiosa* (Milano: Adelphi, 2003); English translation by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, *The Phenomenology of Religious Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2004).

4. Piero Coda, *Il logos e il nulla. Trinità religioni mistica* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2003), 20, 316–322. Of great interest in this regard is G. M. Zanghì, *Dio che è amore: Trinità e vita in Cristo* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2004).

5. D. Gracia, "Zubiri y la experiencia teológica: La difícil tarea de pensar a dios y la religión a la altura del s. XX," en P. Brickle, *La filosofía como pasión* (Madrid: Trotta, 2003), 259.

6. Silvana Filippi, "Martin Heidegger y la mística eckhartiana," *Invenio* (2003): 34.

7. *Ibid.*, 35.

particular focus on the "event" (*Ereignis*) of being, that is to the event which is its own source. If there is a relationship between being and *Dasein*, in the same way that theology speaks of the relationship between God and the soul, we must conceive of it as something beyond all words and perhaps all thought (at least all rational thought). Here we see the parallel between Heidegger's *Ereignis* and Eckart's negative theology.

We find a similar relationship, but with a completely Spanish *spirit*, between Maria Zambrano and John of the Cross. Zambrano, a great expert and admirer of the Spanish mystic poet, dedicated an interesting article to the "doctor of the Nada, the Nothing" with the title: "Saint John of the Cross, from Dark Night to Clear Mysticism."<sup>8</sup> She always looked at mysticism from its human, rather than its religious dimension.<sup>9</sup> In a letter to her theologian friend, Agustin Andreu, she expresses her passion for "opening reason, uniting reason and devotion, reason and fundamental sentiment, philosophy and poetry."<sup>10</sup> Or as she also said, "Humanity

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8. Maria Zambrano, in *La razón en la sombra: Antologica critica*, ed. by Jesús Moreno Sanz (Madrid: Siruela, 2004), 490–498.

9. In a letter written from Piece in France, where she lived for a few years, to the theologian, Agustin Andreu, she expresses her radical refusal of every anthropology that is closed to the transcendent. It must be said, however, that Zambrano's hermeneutics of John of the Cross is affected by a vision of mysticism that is rooted in the Greek model of exteriority versus interiority in the search for the divine: Zambrano, *Cartas de la Piece: Correspondencia con Agustin Andreu* (Valencia: Pretextos, 2002), 28f.

10. *Ibid.*, 195. For Zambrano, mysticism and poetry are linked. For this reason she admired John of the Cross who, the perfect synthesis of mystic and poet, reached the highest peak, non-existence: "his being is finally to manage not to be" (Maria Zambrano, *La razón en la sombra*, 491). He lived out this seeking "not to be" as an imperative that came from life itself. The mystic's revolution is in complete self-alienation, in becoming other, in the complete destruction of self, putting self aside so that another comes to exist in the mystic. Having consumed all the dimensions of being, mental, moral and so on, all that remains is "all-consuming love" (*ibid.*, 494). The mystic goes

is the being that suffers its own transcendence.”<sup>11</sup> Transcending oneself to fulfill oneself, this is where, Zambrano seems to tell us, human perfection lies.

These remarks were necessary by way of introduction, as they give an idea of current attitudes in the field of philosophical anthropology, and so provide us with background for our consideration of Chiara Lubich’s “Look at all the Flowers.” I shall seek to highlight what this passage means for philosophical anthropology, without pretending to exhaust all its implications.<sup>12</sup> In fact, taking into consideration the richness of Chiara’s text and the brief scope of this study with its focus upon phenomenological analysis, what is said can only be a few initial comments and they would require further study and elaboration.

### Transcendence and Spirituality of the Human Being

“Souls in the past,” Chiara affirms, “sought God present in their hearts.” If we assimilate the notion of a “soul” to that of a “mystic,” in a hermeneutics that sees this as the peak, for any person, of a human being’s experience as a human being, we could say that this affirmation of Chiara highlights the search for God that takes place through the human being’s self-transcendence. The mystic, insofar as he or she is a creature touched by God, looks for God by being always more immersed in that “wound” of self-transcendence. John of the Cross is the supreme virtuoso

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through the door of love to come to naked reality. John chose love and the way of poetry to transcend himself utterly and through this he reached the perfect unity of love and knowledge.

11. Maria Zambrano, *Cartas de la Pièce*, 279.

12. It should be said at the outset that Chiara uses brief comparisons not so much to make evaluations as to make herself more aware of the spiritual gift received.

in describing this structure of transcendence that starts from the gift of being wounded by God.<sup>13</sup> In the poem, “Transcending All Knowledge,”<sup>14</sup> written after “an ecstasy of profound contemplation,” he feels that in this way he reaches the most complete knowledge of God and of himself.

But this is not perfection, Chiara goes on to tell us, for God “is also in the heart my brothers and sisters.” Therefore, perfection is not God in me, but “perfection is: God in God (because he is Unity and Trinity).” The structure of transcendence seems to acquire a new dimension. This is the basis, then, for the joy found in the soul of the other, love for the word more than just silence, experiencing the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, as one but not alone, and the experience of Love. This is the basis for delight instead of darkness with its burden of aridity and bitterness. Furthermore, the experience of the Trinity takes place in human bodies and therefore has meaning and structure that is interpersonal and Christic.

There is no doubt that “souls in the past” also saw God in their neighbors; they communicated their experience of God to others, and they found happiness besides their trials as part of the rigors of an ascetic life. We cannot doubt the Christological value of these

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13. About the beginning of the *Spiritual Canticle* it is said that “God’s love not only makes the person leave or put aside the love of other things, but it makes the person come out of self. . . . Without taking anything away from the human effort to purify oneself through the way of love and also to show the need to purify love itself. . . . John of the Cross insisted, with equal or even greater strength, on the fact that it is impossible to reach the goal without God’s intervention, which is purifying love.” J. D. Gaitan, “Dios como amor purificador en San Juan de la Cruz,” *Revista de Espiritualidad* 67 (2008): 67.

14. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D. C.: ICS Publications, 1973), 718–719.

experiences, if only because, as we have said, the initiative did not come from them but from a touch that, inasmuch as it was divine, could not fail to enflame the heart and fill it with love. This is the nature of Christian mysticism.

### Transferring Self to Other

What, then, is specific and original in Chiara's text with regard to what it means to be human? In order to answer this question adequately, we must briefly recall some ideas we explored at the outset. We spoke about the new developments in culture, which Luis Castrillón calls post-humanist, meaning a new humanism "freed from the hegemony of historical context and endowed with a sense of transcendence and interiority."<sup>15</sup> This is a phenomenology that admits a phenomenon's excess in such a way that we are made able to see all that truly appears in a phenomenon because it is what is contained in it. It is a new humanism that tries to go beyond every fragmentation in human intelligence and seeks "to understand a humanity that reveals itself in giving, gratuitousness, and encounter,"<sup>16</sup> seeing as it is, in its body, mind, and spirit.

The fundamental categories present in this reading of the human would seem to be three: transcendence, relationality, and corporeality. It is in the context of these themes that, it seems to me, the contribution of Chiara Lubich's mysticism of unity is to

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15. Luis Alberto Castrillón López, "El posthumanismo del amor: El giro místico de la fenomenología," *Logos* 21 (1012): 69. This refers to a non-metaphysical humanism, and it is an affirmation that it should be explored in the context of an overview of the state of metaphysics as a discipline. In fact, in principle, a humanism open to the transcendent ought not be contrary to a metaphysical humanism. It all depends upon how metaphysics is conceived.

16. *Ibid.*

be found in line with the interesting developments we have already mentioned. I will try to make this clear in three steps.

### Transcendence

The first step has to do with the concept of *transcendence*.<sup>17</sup> In the impulse to transcend oneself, the emphasis is in the moment of "trans" (from the Latin *trans* + *scandere*, "beyond" + "climb/pass"). In existential logic, this "trans" (beyond) is connected to the "ex" of existence (from the Latin *existere*, composed of *ex* + *sistere*, "remain, stay"). In fact we exist *from* (that is "ex"), pushing *ipseity* from itself towards "trans." Yet, in Heidegger's phenomenological analysis and also in others,<sup>18</sup> we have the impression that the "trans" remains to some extent closed in *ipseity*, as if it loses its original openness.<sup>19</sup> Jean-Luc Marion denounced this risk of solipsism in Heidegger. In this sense, Chiara's "God in God" seems to be a step of greater radicalness in the understanding of human transcendence, of human ecstasy (Greek *ek-stasis*, out-stand/place) towards the other. This would be a radical transcendence of self beyond *ipseity*, without denying it, precisely because *it has*

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17. I shall use the term "transcend" in its etymological meaning of going beyond what is perceived as real. Regarding the term "transcendental," its meaning, depending on the case, will be identified when necessary. It refers to the Greek mediaeval conception or that developed by Xavier Zubiri, moving away from Husserl. For Zubiri, the category of the transcendental refers to the purely physical character of reality. This category is not located outside reality but emerges from it. Because of its "trans" character, this transcendental nature or the transcendental structure of reality can be called "metaphysics" (Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998), 113–123.

18. *Ibid.*, 85.

19. I am referring to certain currents of existentialism that are based in phenomenology (see Sartre, for example). To some extent, also, Levinas is affected by this kind of turning in upon self.

*already been transcended.* It is not that this does not take place in all experiences of interpersonal encounter with the o/Other, but here it would seem to be rendered more effectively explicit.<sup>20</sup>

### Relationality

The second step considers the concept of *relation*. The category of relation is fundamental for any kind of philosophical anthropology seeking to see the human as truly open. Nowadays, in an attempt to overcome the possible weaknesses of this concept, there is a preference to speak of *relationality*, precisely to highlight its transcendental character.<sup>21</sup> Here too, the “God in God” of “Look at all the Flowers” presupposes a step of greater radicalness. In effect, Chiara’s expression suggests a dimension anterior to every relation, a dimension that is, we could say, structural, which makes relation possible and gives it a basis. Otherwise, the category of relation would remain subject to external or internal, social or subjective dynamics, which would not touch the personal depths of the human being. The dimension of *transcendental relationality* emerges within the perspective of “Look at all the Flowers,” but this is not in reference to being, and so it does not become a universal and abstract concept (which it risks in Greek-mediaeval metaphysics). Instead, it refers simply to reality just as it appears

20. We could say that in mystical experience *ipseity* does not undergo any closing in on self, rather, that the experience inasmuch as it is total ecstasy with God as its source and goal, is actually the highest openness. This is incontrovertible. Perhaps the problem lies in its conceptualization and in its anthropological meaning. This is where we can notice a certain kind of “closure.” Hence, not every experience of transcendence necessarily goes beyond *ipseity*, beyond the self, not even in the setting of intersubjectivity.

21. Mauro Mantovani, “Persona e relazione, tra teologia e filosofia,” in Manlio Sodi and Lluís Clavel, eds., *Relazione? Una categoria che interpella* (Citta Del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 69–82. Relationality can be seen as alongside the classic transcendentals, with all the metaphysical implications.

(and in this case to human reality). If relations are possible among human beings it is because there is a relational structure. In this sense, relationality is not a concept but a structure of the human person.<sup>22</sup> The person is structurally open, and for this reason has transcendental relationality.

### Corporeality

The third step looks at the theme of the body that for decades has been a focus for phenomenological and metaphysical hermeneutics. The attempt is to overcome the dualism pervading Western philosophy and emphasized by modernity insofar as it derived from idealism. Here, we can locate the inquiries of French phenomenology, from Merleau-Ponty with his concept of the *intentionality of the body* or Michel Henry and his theory of the *subjective body*, up to the present, passing through the inquiry of Jean-Luc Marion. Xavier Zubiri distinguishes between *corporeity* and *corporeality*: the latter refers to the material organism, while *corporeity* is the body that is actualized in the person, a type of *personalized body*.<sup>23</sup> Chiara, in the text that we are considering, says that the “Trinity

22. In Zubiri’s terms, the transcendental structure of human reality gives a basis to relationality. In this sense, it is possible to speak of transcendental relationality. Cf. Xavier Zubiri, *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998), 122.

23. Cf. Xavier Zubiri, *El hombre y su cuerpo*, en *Escritos Menores* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2006), 113–116. The observation of V. M. Tirado San Juan is also interesting, with regard to the vision that Zubiri has of the body: “The human being is also nature, but a nature of such an essence . . . that it is transcended in something that is no longer nature, that ‘appears of itself’ to be an open essence (a *hyper-keimenon*) and, that is, a personal substantiveness which, as such, is not part of the cosmic causal order and follows a different course: the course of freedom.” V. M. Tirado, “La encarnación del yo o la inteligencia sentiente: El yo y su cuerpo en Merleau-Ponty y Zubiri. Primera parte: Zubiri,” *Cuadernos Salmantinos de filosofía* 25 (1998): 229.

dwells in human bodies,” and goes on to say that, “Jesus is there: the God-Man.” The statement is somewhat bold. The text refers to *trinitarian relationships* assumed into Jesus, so to speak, which implies transcendence and relationality of an unprecedented value. This seems to be a further step with respect to expressions such as *intentional, subjective, or personalized body*.<sup>24</sup>

### Trinitarian Foundation of Transferring Self

Having indicated Chiara’s contribution in this text to the field of philosophical anthropology, we need now to make explicit the foundation of her radicalization. From the text itself it is clear that it is a *Trinitarian revelation* as unfolded in the Paschal event: “God who is in me,” affirms Chiara, “who has shaped my soul, who lives there as Trinity (with the saints and with the Angels), is also in the heart of my brothers and sisters.”

Emilio Baccharini, in line with the developments in philosophical anthropology we have described, maintains that today it is fundamental to think of the human being in the context of the radicalness of the Christian event.<sup>25</sup> In this sense, the Trinity is a datum that appears as a “fundamental epistemological form.”<sup>26</sup> This is connected to the current pressing debate about the possible and necessary relationship between ontology and theology. It would seem that the mysticism of unity, which Chiara’s text illustrates, begins with this Trinitarian form of epistemology that

24. In other passages, Chiara uses the verb *trinitize* that, since it is used between human persons, includes corporeity.

25. Emilio Baccharini, “Pensare l’uomo a partire dell’evento cristiano,” in *Persona, logos, relazione: Uno fenomenologia plurale*, ed., Angela Ales Bello (Rome: Citta Nuova, 2011), 472–479.

26. According to Mantovani the expression goes back to the theologian Nicola Ciola: Mauro Mantovani, *Persona e relazione: Tra teologia e filosofia*, 70.

presupposes, as pointed out above, a radicalization of the perspectives of openness and transcendence that today permeate inquiries into the nature of what is to be human.

This is how the mysticism of unity translates transcending self into “transferring self” in our brother or sister,<sup>27</sup> and this is nothing other than the active side of “receiving self,” another anthropological category with a Trinitarian background. But this self-transcendence is transferring self into “God *in* my brother or sister” (my italics) and not into God *of* my brother or sister, which signals that openness to the other has itself already been transcended. God is not of my brother or sister nor is God mine, but we are in God. What all mystics in history have surely experienced, here seems to be expressed in a way that is closer to reality. At the same time, relationality is not binary or biunique but *Trinitarian relationality* or “Trinitarity” *given as gift*<sup>28</sup> that, for this reason, is never manipulable but continuously open to the mystery of this gift. In the light of the Trinitarian mystery, reciprocity is thus radically founded.<sup>29</sup>

In Chiara’s text, corporeity acquires a fundamental Christological value that suggests the Trinitarian event with powerful social

27. Antonio Rosmini uses a similar notion when he speaks of “transporting self into the other” as a movement determined by the personal nature of the human being: Antonio Rosmini, *Teosofia*, n. 872.

28. This trinitarian nature definitively qualifies transcendental relationality, in the meaning given above, with a radical note of reciprocity. In “trinitarity” reciprocity is also a transcendental.

29. As Piero Coda says, “[R]eciprocity, which is not closed but open, not inclusive but effusive, is the grammar of the origin and the destination of humanity in which the human is written.” Piero Coda, “Individuo e comunità: Una prospettiva teologica,” in *Persona, Logos, Relazione: Una fenomenologia plural. Scritti in onore di Angela Ales Bello*, eds. E. Baccharini, M. D’Ambra, P. Manganaro, and A.M. Pezzella (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 379.

and historical, human-divine implications. It is in this dimension of corporeity and historicity that we need to situate another fundamental meaning of the text: Jesus forsaken as the key of “transferring self,” which takes place in what Chiara calls leaving “God for God,” a process that leads to discovering the Spirit in God in self, the fullness of Love.<sup>30</sup> Jesus forsaken presents himself as the pattern in the pattern, or the form in the form, of that “*Trinitarity*” given as gift, and in this the text shows us the originality of Chiara’s vision of what it is to be human. In this sense, the mystery of Jesus forsaken reveals the face of Love in the dimension of absolute gift and tells us that “transferring self” is nothing other than loving. This form in the form, precisely because it is identified with Jesus forsaken, acquires an inevitably kenotic dimension. It is the *kenotic nature* of giving and of love, without which any hope of meaning for suffering and pain would elude us, as well as any real possibility of understanding love in the human condition.

What does all this mean for an understanding of what it is to be human, seen now not so much as a fundamental form of philosophical anthropology but in its existential repercussions? At the outset I spoke of “a mystical shift in philosophy” and of “a theological shift in phenomenology,” and now we are able to see that *transferring self into the other*, with its Trinitarian radicalization, means avoiding the risk of a spiritualized or individualistic hermeneutics of such a profound anthropological shift—a risk that is very clear, even if paradoxical, in these times of globalization, with all its solitude, intolerance, and depersonalized massification.

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30. Here too we find the same dynamic as seen above in transferring self. Chiara says that in the returning movement the soul does not return into itself, but “to God within.”

Next, Chiara’s text urges us towards a more radically relational *praxis*, inasmuch as the proposal goes in the same direction as a continuous *living out of our transferring of self* (“Therefore the soul, after an entire day of having lost God within itself willingly in order to transfer itself . . .”) and the living out, in the mutuality, of *welcoming the other*. And here we should emphasize that life lived in this way brings with it in equal measure that fullness of happiness which the experience of a meeting of persons promises in itself and also that communitarian and social commitment which, worked out in history, is implicit in this experience. The heaven of the other is my heaven. In it not only is my heaven not lost, but it is also constantly preserved, rediscovered and enriched as part of a greater heaven which is definitively the heaven of each of us and of all. Therefore the heaven of the other is to be respected, welcomed, guarded, and valued in its uniqueness. This is the basis for active and concrete commitment so the other too may feel that he or she is a heaven.

In short, in the light of Chiara’s statement “to look at all the flowers is to have Jesus’ vision,” we can conclude that “transferring self into God in the Other,” in its Christological grounding, is not only a mystical experience of tremendous implications for what it is to be human, but it is also a *method* of understanding the divine and the human. It is what Piero Coda calls thinking from and within the Trinity: a form of thinking whereby I transfer myself into the other’s thought so as to welcome the other fully in a process in which my own thought is recreated.<sup>31</sup> It is the intellectual

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31. Piero Coda, *Teo-logia: La parola di dio nella parole dell-uomo* (Rome, PUL Mursia, 1997), 244; *Dalla Trinità: L'avvento di dio tra storia e profezia* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011), 584–591.

aspect of recollecting oneself in the presence of every person without, as Chiara's text says, avoiding the other. After all, this is the experience that with humility, and not without effort, we try to live in the Abba School.

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