

God and Creation

Trinity and Creation out of Nothing¹

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that reinterprets the vestigia trinitatis in creation and gives a fresh understanding of creation's vocation to share in the divine life.

To Acquaint Ourselves with the Issue
The approach in this essay on God and creation is not purely biblical but theological, while obviously proceeding constantly from and in the light that comes to us from the Word of God.

The question of God's relationship with creation touches upon important contemporary issues with regard to science, interfaith dialogue, and contemporary philosophy. Using the fundamental and specifically Christian theological stance that begins from creatio ex nihilo, the author shows how Chiara Lubich, on the basis of her charism of unity, develops an original understanding of the event of creation in which God creates by giving being to nonbeing, constantly creating historically and preserving in being what is created, and, at the same time, making what is created evolve. The basis for this understanding is to read creation out of nothing in light of a radical understanding of divine love that, as a result of its own dynamic, is both One and Three. This vision of reality implicitly contains a Trinitarian metaphysics

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Current Relevance and Implications

A basic theological reflection on the relationship between God and creation is of great topical relevance nowadays. It involves a question that, even if only rarely asked explicitly, provides the backdrop for so many of the issues and problems that contemporary culture is facing.² One need only think of the pressing questions to which the Christian doctrine of creation has been subjected by physicists (with the Big Bang theory)³, by cosmology (with its anthropic principle)⁴ and by the new ecological and holistic awareness that is marking the passage from modernity to postmodernity.⁵

2. Evidence of this renewed interest in the subject of the beginning (the Greek philosophers' *archè*) can be found, for example, in Massimo Cacciari's tour de force, significantly entitled *Dell'Inizio* (Milan: Adelphi, 1990).

3. See Brendan Purcell, *From Big Bang to Big Mystery: Human Origins in Light of Creation and Evolution* (New York: New City Press, 2012).

4. See John Polkinghorne, *Faith, Science, and Understanding* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

5. With regard to these themes in general, see: in Italy, the documentation from the Conference of the Italian Theological Association entitled *Futuro del cosmo: Futuro dell'uomo* (Padua: EMP, 1997); in France, the wide-ranging and accurate review by Jean-Michel Maldamé, "Science et foi: Conditions nouvelles du dialogue," *Revue Thomiste* (1997): 525–62, the work of the astrophysicist Michel Cassé, *Du vide et de la*

But interreligious dialogue also seems to be calling the concept of creation into question. For example, the Buddhist interpretation of the universe has difficulty not only in accepting but also in understanding the sort of God-world duality that the creation principle would seem to postulate, at least in some of its simplistic and reductive interpretations.⁶ This is to say nothing of a whole vein of modern philosophy that—starting with Nietzsche and passing through Heidegger—sees the interweaving of the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing with the Greek metaphysics of being versus becoming as the cause of the nihilism into which the history of Western culture has fatally slipped. Some authors argue that a mysterious obfuscation of the perception of God’s creative presence seems to be casting its shadow over our era: If everything

création (Paris: O. Jacob, 1996), and that of the theologian Adolphe Gesché, *Dieu pour penser: Le cosmos* (Paris: Cerf, 1994); in Germany, the volume by Alexandre Ganoczy, *Suche nach Gott auf den wegen der natur: Theologie, mystik, naturwissenschaften; Ein kritischer versuch* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1992), and Max Seckler’s essay “Was heisst eigentlich ‘schöpfung?’ Zugleich ein beitrag zum dialog zwischen theologie und naturwissenschaft” *Theologische Quartalschrift* (1997): 161–88; in English, Keith Ward, *Religion and Creation* (Oxford: OUP, 1996).

6. Here is evidence from two well-known thinkers from the Kyoto School in Japan, who have opened a dialogue with Christian thought regarding the creation theme. Kitaro Nishida writes: “God has created the world out of love. And this entails the self-negation of the absolute—that *God is love* . . . the absolute affirmation through the self-negation of God, and this is the true meaning of creation” (*The Logic of Place and a Religious Worldview* [Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987]a, 100, 86–87). Later, Masao Abe writes: “The Christian God ought to be understood not as a God who is far from non-being and negativity, but as a God who willingly takes on a non-being and a self-denial. . . . Although self-sufficient, God denies Himself out of love and creates the world as different from Himself” (“Buddhism and Christianity as a Problem of Today,” *Japanese Religions* [1963]: 10). For a full comparison of the Kyoto School and Christianity, see Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of the Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

is born of nothing, then everything is also irreparably destined to return to nothing.⁷

This field of research requiring further in-depth analysis is thus vast and the need to do it is pressing. This field extends from exegesis on the teaching that comes to us from scripture and the revisiting of assertions of dogma acquired through tradition to more systematic theological reflections, all of which have secured important results over the last decades. In this context, Chiara Lubich’s theological vision of the relationship between God and creation shows a richly creative relevance and an equally incisive originality. It is this vision that I would seek to explore here, offering no more than a sort of reasoned indication of some of the subjects on which her perspective sheds light.

Regarding the Meaning of the Concept of Creation

Before we get to the heart of our subject, it seems essential to make a preliminary, methodological remark that may allow us to get off to a good start. What does the word “creation” mean? And how are we to understand the concept if we are to keep as

7. In an interview, Emanuele Severino summarized this point of view thus: “At the root of Western culture there now lies the persuasion that the real things we have to deal with are ephemeral. We can certainly try to grab and hold onto the greatest possible number of them but the undisputed fact remains that the great, unchanging gods conferring a stable sense of the world no longer exist. The message that our culture gives to contemporary humanity is that everything is nothing, in the sense that everything comes out of nothing and goes back into nothing. So, I wonder whether those who assume psychologically deviant attitudes—the mad, the depressed and those we consider not to be normal—may not, in reality, be far-sighted. Far-sighted because through their behavior they are drawing the conclusion that must inevitably be drawn from a vision of the nullity of things” (*l’Unità*, July 21, 1997, 2).

close as possible to the perspective of revelation? As it is generally used in our cultural context, the term “creation” has three distinct meanings.

The first is typical of biblical revelation and has been defined with the precision of dogma through the reflection of the Church Fathers and the medieval theologians. It indicates that *act* of God and God alone through which God freely gives being to that which is not. In this sense, the word “creation” has a primarily verbal meaning insofar as it indicates “creating” as an action that is specifically God’s and no one else’s.

A second meaning, one obviously closely linked to and deriving from the first, indicates that *being* is distinct from God and is the fruit of God’s creative act. This is creation as a “noun,” that is, as “that which has been created,” of which—in the light of Christian revelation—the cosmos and humanity must be seen as its culmination and fullest meaning.

But there is also a third, deeper, and broader meaning. Already present in the Old Testament, it is most clearly expressed in the New Testament, gaining ground in Christian self-awareness in the light of an understanding of Jesus Christ as the heart of God’s salvation plan. Here, creation means *relationship* between God and that to which God freely makes the gift of existence. Creation is so as to introduce it into full communion with Godself. Thus creation has the meaning of a dynamic *event*, of *history*: the history of God’s relationship with humanity and through the latter with the cosmos. Paul illustrates this meaning in his Letter to the Ephesians (Eph 1:3-10), where he gives a panoramic view of the plan always known and desired by God the Father in Jesus Christ, in whom “we were chosen before the world was created.” This plan was implemented in the fullness of time through the incarnation

of the Son of God and is destined to come to its fulfilment in the recapitulation of all things in him.

In this perspective, the biblical scholar Giuseppe Barbaglio can justifiably formulate the following thesis:

[C]reation is the whole range of divine action, from the forming of the world and the birth of humanity to the end of the kingdom, passing through the historical phases of the People of Israel’s salvation adventure, the existence of Jesus Christ Who died and rose again and the experience of the community of believers.⁸

Chiara Lubich’s Perspective

Chiara opts decisively for this last perspective, but she does not neglect the other meanings of the concept of creation, especially not the first: that of creation as an act of God. As we shall see, this meaning has a huge metaphysical importance. It helps us understand the meaning of all that is.⁹ I am thinking, in particular, of a passage of hers that has, for me, shed much light on our subject: “God creates in the same way as He develops the Heavens. The

8. Giuseppe Barbaglio, “Creazione: Messaggio biblico,” *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, ed. Giuseppe Barbaglio and Severino Dianich (Alba: Edizioni Paoline, 1977), 185.

9. In reality, in order to be understood correctly from the viewpoint of Christian revelation, the abovementioned concept of creation as an event must be related to that which emphasizes the novelty and freedom of the creative act by which God brings into being that which is not. This in order to safeguard the ontological difference between God and that which is created, insofar as only God is through Himself and in Himself. Even when that which has been created is brought (through Christ and in the Spirit) to participate in God’s Being, God remains, precisely, the permanent origin of the absolutely free gift of His Being to the created being (which, by itself, is not).

later Heaven surpasses the former in infinite beauty, and recapitulates it.”¹⁰

In Chiara’s language, “Heaven” is the Reality that God enables her to live unity with her brothers and sisters sealed by the Eucharist. God gives Himself to her in ever new ways, so that the Reality that follows surpasses the preceding Reality and contains it within itself. Reading creation in this perspective, Chiara explains:

God first created the whole universe. Then humanity. The universe without humanity would have appeared an absurdity and humanity crowned it. Humanity crowned it and was its synthesis: it is the head of the universe and therefore contains it. The universe did not appear absurd during creation, however, since the last thing to be created was the head of all the rest and its crowning.

However, she then states more specifically, “[A]ll creatures and humanity are summed up in Jesus.”

Thus Chiara emphasizes that creation is precisely an “event”: God brings that which is created into being, thereby beginning a story. So creation stretches over time and develops. It is not simply a specific act that is realized once and for all in the beginning. In this way, the conflict between nature and history that has marked Western culture is overcome. We normally say that there is the cosmos, on the one hand, and there is human history born of freedom, on the other. In reality, things are simpler and at the

10. All quotations that do not have footnote references are from Chiara’s unpublished writings from her mystical period called “Paradise ’49.” For a translation of the beginning of this text and a contextualization of the full text, see *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 1, no. 1 (2012): 5–23.

same time more profound. While not denying that the human being gifted with intelligence and freedom is original and distinct from the other created beings, Chiara says that it is also necessary to emphasize humanity’s communion with nature. Indeed, Paul demonstrates this communion in his letter to the Romans when he states that “the whole creation is eagerly waiting for God to reveal his sons” and “still retains the hope of being freed from its slavery to decadence, to enjoy the same freedom and glory as the children of God” (Rom 8:19-21).

The schematic distinction between creation and redemption became established in theology after the patristic period. Thus it became necessary to pose the question whether the incarnation of the Son of God would have been necessary had there been no original sin.¹¹ For Chiara, this must be profoundly re-understood in a unitary and dynamic perspective. Because just as the human being sums up the cosmos insofar as the cosmos finds its meaning in humanity, so Jesus sums up humanity and the meaning of humanity’s history.¹²

Creation must therefore be conceived of as an event: a unitary event that is fully realized in Jesus Christ and that strains toward its eschatological consummation. This is the basic perspective that

11. This problem is overcome in the theology of Franciscan inspiration that, being decidedly Christocentric, intuitively understands the unity of the divine salvation plan. In this respect, the theological vision of Duns Scotus is emblematic. He writes, “I say therefore that the fall was not the cause of Christ’s predestination and that if no one had fallen, neither the angel nor man, in this hypothesis, Christ would still have been predestined in this way” (*Reportatio Parisiensis in III Sent.* D. 7, q. 4).

12. Contemporary theology is moving in this direction. Karl Rahner emphasizes that “the human being . . . is the true primary intention of creation understood as the pre-condition of the divine self-communication,” and thus “a theological doctrine of creation . . . must have a Christological orientation” (*Schöpfungslehre*, in *LThK*, IX [Freiburg: I.B., 1963], 472).

stands out clearly in Chiara's thinking. More specifically, she sees creation from the perspective of the "One" that is at the same time its Origin (the One and Triune God) and its eschatological point of arrival ("God all in all"). It is not a question of creation as only a matter of causing being to spring out of the nothing "outside" God. Rather, creation is a causing of being to spring out of the nothing outside God so that God, through Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, may give God's own Being to created being.¹³

A Trinitarian and Creational Metaphysics of Love

In Chiara's thinking, this unitary and dynamic vision is totally imbued with all that is most original in what the New Testament tells us about God's being and acting: "God is *Agape*" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). With a radical and also intellectual faithfulness to this confession of faith that summarizes the Christological revelation, Chiara sees in *agape* not only one in the variety of God's attributes but also that which expresses God's very Being. For this reason, one can and one must say that the Being of God is Love. This allows us to penetrate the mystery of God in Godself. Precisely because God is Love, God is One and Three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or as Augustine explains, the Lover, the Beloved, and their reciprocal Love.¹⁴ It also allows us to penetrate the mystery of creation, its

most profound *raison d'être*, its dynamic and its purpose.¹⁵ Chiara writes: "Everything that is in the creation is a creature of God, of that God who (as Love) cannot (does not want to) give what He does not have, what He is not."

To put it positively: God, being Love, cannot not but want to share everything God has and is with His creatures. So, the key to casting light on the mystery of creation—on the being that is created by God—is precisely this: the fact that God, because God is Love, wants to give His very Being to that which is not Godself. In another text, Chiara develops this perspective further:

Everything that God makes is perfect, perfect like God, and therefore Trinitarian, which means Loving, in the sense of bringing one's brother, the other, to one's own level by communicating oneself to the other.

The first person to live the commandment to love one's neighbor—"love your neighbor *as yourself*"—is God. Indeed, God creates the other (God's neighbor) from Godself, so as to make him or her become like Godself, another Self. This is because God is Love; God is Trinity. Were God not to love His creature to that extent, God would not be totally and only Love. Chiara writes:

De Trinitate, VIII, 10, 14: "Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love. What, then, is love, except a certain life which couples or seeks to couple together some two things, namely, him that loves and that which is loved?"

15. In reality, traces of this vision are present in the whole of the church's great theological and mystical tradition. For example, Catherine of Siena writes, "For what reason would you have elevated man to such great dignity? Of course, it was the unfathomable love with which you looked upon your creature within yourself and you fell in love with that creature" (*Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza*, chapter 13).

13. Giuseppe Colombo writes, "Jesus Christ is the revelation of creation's meaning. That is, he reveals that creation is the action God takes in order to communicate the Trinitarian existence *ad extra* and, more precisely, in order to generate sons and daughters of God *ad extra*" ("Creazione: Riflessione teologica," *Nuovo Dizionario di Teologia*, 201).

14. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12: "Embrace the love of God, and by love embrace God . . . 'God is love; and he that dwells in love, dwells in God'; but when I see love, I do not see in it the Trinity. Nay, but you see the Trinity if you see love. But if I can, I will put you in mind, that you may see that you see it." St. Augustine,

In loving the Son, the Father loves Himself. Loving us as He loves His Son, He loves us as He loves Himself. Therefore He lives the Gospel. He loves His neighbor (and we are God's neighbors) as Himself.

In light of this, I will now try, in a few rapid brushstrokes, to depict the main phases of the creation event in the perspective of what we could call Chiara's Trinitarian and creation metaphysics of love. The phases are consecutive if considered in terms of temporal development. This is because God first creates the cosmos, then human beings appear and then, in the fullness of time, there is the event of Jesus: his incarnation, his forsakenness, his resurrection, his ascent to the bosom of the Father. But at the same time, while the phases are chronologically distinct and follow one after the other, they are also—if seen from the perspective of the One—dimensions that bit by bit begin to constitute the creation event in its final meaning and its eschatological point of arrival, revealing and realizing God's final project. So the cosmos is recapitulated in humanity, humanity is recapitulated in Jesus, and Jesus carries everything with Him to the bosom of the Father.¹⁶

Creation out of God the Trinity

Creation out of Nothing

The first point for development here concerns the initial act through which God creates and the permanent act through which God supports that which he has created, keeps it in being, and makes

16. After all, this is Paul's perspective when he states succinctly, "all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God" (1 Cor 3: 21–23).

it evolve. Following the perspective of biblical revelation, Christian theology has developed a concept that is characteristically its own and original to it: the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing).¹⁷ This precise formula is intended to emphasize two things of the utmost importance. On the one hand, that God alone is and has always been and that every being other than God has its origin from God, without the contribution of anything else. On the other hand, that the origin of things from God is the fruit of freedom, a newness that is rooted solely in God's freely made and gratuitous choice to love. "The newness of the world," writes Aquinas, "cannot be demonstrated on the part of the world itself."¹⁸

Within the perspective of a Trinitarian metaphysics of love, it is possible to penetrate more deeply into the reason for, and the dynamics of, the event of creation "out of nothing." This is a path of reflection that contemporary theologians are beginning to follow. One may think of Hans Urs von Balthasar¹⁹ in the Catholic

17. This doctrine of the faith was formulated by the IV Lateran Council (1215): DS 800; by the Council of Florence (1442): DS 1333; and by the First Vatican Council (1870): DS 3002. Thomas Aquinas explains, "If the emanation of the whole universal being from the first principle be considered, it is impossible that any being should be presupposed before this emanation. For *nothing* is the same as no being. . . . So creation, which is the emanation of all being, is from the 'not-being' which is 'nothing'" (*Summa Theologiae* I, 45, 1, c). As regards the genesis of this formula during the patristic period as the updating extension of the doctrine contained in the Hebrew-Christian revelation, see Jacques Fantino, "L'origine de la doctrine de la création ex nihilo," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* (1996): 589–602, which enters into a dialogue with the book on the same subject by Gerhard May, *Creation ex nihilo: The Doctrine of "Creation out of Nothing" in Early Christian Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd, 1994).

18. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 46, 2 c.

19. See Hans U. von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory, vol. 5: The Last Act*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998).

tradition; even more so of Sergei Bulgakov²⁰ in the Orthodox tradition; and of Jürgen Moltmann²¹ in the Protestant tradition. As far as the philosophical field is concerned, one can think of Maurice Blondel.²² Chiara herself writes:

When God created, He created all things out of nothing because He created them from Himself. Out of nothing means that they did not pre-exist because He alone pre-existed (but this way of speaking is inappropriate since there is no before or after in God). He created them out of Himself, however, because in creating them He died (of love), He died in love; He loved and so created.²³

20. See, above all, Bulgakov's *Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002).

21. See Moltmann's *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (London: SCM Press, 1985).

22. Having observed that "the idea of nothing is a pseudo-idea," Blondel states, "God most certainly does not leave outside Himself absolutely anything that one may imagine empty or call positive nothingness. But in that case, it will be said, where are we to place the potential or existing creatures, then, in this integrally compact monism? . . . I have already remembered, by having recourse (like Ravaissan) to St. Paul's sublime expression, *Deus semetipsum exinanivit*: God, in order to create, has not produced a new fullness or at least a semi-fullness, some ontological nebula, outside and alongside Himself (which would be absurd). . . . It is less deceptive to start from the premise of a wholly merciful intention on the part of the Creator, Who prepares the possibility of life, happiness and a transforming union for other Selves not in space, not in His substantive fullness but in His fruitful love" (*L'Être et les êtres* [Paris: PUF, 1963], 311–12; see Santino Cavaciuti, "Naturale e soprannaturale nell'ontologia di Blondel," in *Attualità del pensiero di M. Blondel*, ed. Romeo Crippa and Peter Henrici (Milan: Massimo, 1976), 103–8).

23. Of the authors referred to, it seems particularly meaningful to quote some of the statements Bulgakov makes in his book *Bride of the Lamb*: "Absolute nothing, *ouk on*, simply does not exist; it is a 'conditional reflex' of our thought, not more. And if we believe that the world is created out of nothing, then, in the positive sense, this can mean only that God created the world out of Himself" (44). He then explains, "God is

Chiara sees creation as a "death," as God's loving *kenosis*: the leaving room for the other or indeed, from our perspective here, the making oneself the other. This is analogous to what happens between the divine Persons in the Trinity, where the Father generates the Son through love, loses Himself in the Son and "dies" in the Son; the Son hands Himself back to the Father through love, loses Himself in the Father and "dies" in Him; and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both through love and fuses them into One through love, loses Himself and "dies" in Them; so that each one of the Three is through, with, and in the Other Two. The only difference is that in creation, this happens on God's part in relation to that which is not God, or better still, in relation to that which of itself simply is not.

In the perspective of charity, we could therefore reformulate the *creatio ex nihilo* principle by speaking of an *ex nihilo amoris*²⁴ in the sense that the "nothing" out of which God creates is that loving nothing that God freely becomes in the moment when God gives being to that which is not. Indeed, in a certain sense, loving

love, and the creation of the world is the action of God's love, its self-revelation" (48). And just as the Trinitarian love between the divine Hypostases is a "supra-eternal *kenosis*, but a *kenosis* that has overcome for each of the hypostases in joint Trinitarian love, in the all-blissfulness of this love" (49), so it is in the creation, where "the Holy Trinity in Unity, or the Unity in Trinity, renounces, as it were, in its sacrificially kenotic love the possession of the divine world for itself and allows this world to have its own being. The Trinity in Unity has, or posits, this world outside itself, in separateness from itself, precisely as the world, as non-hypostatic being" (50). Thus: "The world is the alter-being of the Principle, the creaturely mode of the divine being" (53).

24. The formula *ex amore* ("by love") can be found in the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (No. 19), as can its analogy in the previously cited work by Bulgakov. As regards *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 19, see Andrés Arteuga Manieu, "*Creatio ex amore*": *Hacia una consideración teológica del misterio de la creación en el Concilio Vaticano II* (Santiago: Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, 1995).

always means dying to oneself in order to let the other “be.” Infinitely more than we experience in human existence, however, in God this gift, this loving “death,” is wholly and only positive: it is the expression of the infinite freedom and super-abundance of God’s Being, which is Love.

Scholastic theology clarifies the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* still further by speaking of an *ex nihilo sui et subiecti*, meaning that the “stuff” (the being) of which the creation is made comes totally and only from God. The *ex nihilo “sui”* emphasizes that the creation’s being does not derive from God as if the creation were a part or a necessary expression of Godself. The *ex nihilo “subiecti”* emphasizes that the creation derives nothing from some element of the creation that in some way existed before God’s creative act (such as the prime matter [*prote hule*] or empty space [*chora*] that Aristotle and Plato spoke of, respectively). But this formula does not say positively *how* the creation’s being derives from God’s Being. Nor does it intend to deny that the creation’s being—as Aquinas explains—comes from God’s Being through “emanation” or “participation,” two concepts that are intended to refer to that mystery wherein it is God’s Being that is the sole Principle of every other being.

It is precisely through looking at the Trinity that the Trinitarian perspective of love can help us to penetrate the creation dynamic more deeply. The Father gives Being to the Son by generating Him and, in this way, gives the Son all the Father’s (divine) Being except His paternity. Thus God in giving being to the creation and in Christ Jesus, through the Spirit, gives it all His Being, except His Being God in and through Himself. Therefore, just as the Son—in the Trinity—is God without being the Father, so the creation—in Christ—participates in God’s Being without

being God in and through Himself. Creation is, rather, made to participate fully in God’s Being only and always by way of a gift.²⁵

Trinity and Creation

The understanding of creation is thus indissolubly linked to the mystery of God who is One and Three. This is an article of faith that belongs to the church’s traditional doctrine. St. Augustine, for example, already stated succinctly, *unus mundus factus est a Patre per Filium in Spiritu Sancto* (the one world was made by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit).²⁶ Developing this thought further, Aquinas reached the conclusion that “the causation of creatures belongs to the Persons according to processions and relations.”²⁷

Chiara’s thinking contains an echo of this patristic and scholastic tradition regarding creation as “the work of the Trinity *ad extra*” in light of her own understanding of the One, love, and

25. Obviously, such a revisiting of the traditional doctrine of creation also requires two of the tradition’s other “givens” to be thematically modified and analyzed in greater depth. The first is the ontological status of the “divine ideas” in the Word, and the second is the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, true God and true man, and the participation of other human persons in Him, as His Body, through grace.

26. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium* 20, 9: PL 35, 1561; see also *De Vera Religione* 55, 113: PL 34, 172; and *De Trinitate* 1, 6, 12: PL 42, 827.

27. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 45, 6 ad 2um. He calls the divine processions not only the creation’s *ratio*, but also its *causa*, *exemplar*, and *origo*; see Gilles Emery O.P., *La Trinité créatrice* (Paris: Vrin, 1995). Here is one of Aquinas’s strong statements about the intimate relationship between the creation and the life of the Trinity: “Hence, as the Father speaks Himself and every creature by His begotten Word, inasmuch as the Word ‘begotten’ adequately represents the Father and every creature; so He loves Himself and every creature by the Holy Ghost, inasmuch as the Holy Ghost proceeds as the love of the primal goodness whereby the Father loves Himself and every creature” (*Summa Theologiae* I, 37, 2 ad 3um).

kenosis. We could express her vision more or less in the following terms: God is One and Three because God is Love: Father, Word, and Holy Spirit. The Word is the expression of the Father within Himself, in which the Father contemplates Himself and expresses Himself as infinite tones of Love that converge in One, in the Word that is Love. The Father contemplates in the Word the infinite expressions of Himself—which the classical tradition calls the “divine ideas”—that constitute the Word and, out of love, “dying” out of love, He projects these expressions outside Himself to bring into being another, the creation, that is distinct from Himself and make it freely become another Self.²⁸ Hence, seen in this light,

28. The subject of the divine ideas would require a separate treatment, which is not possible here. Although it appears necessary for an understanding of the creation mystery in a Trinitarian perspective, this subject has fallen into oblivion in modern times after having been widely examined by the Church Fathers and the medieval theologians. This may be primarily because it could lead people to think of a duplication between the two levels or situations of being that the divine ideas have “in” God and “outside” God. For a historical-systematic presentation in contemporary theology, see, in the Catholic Church, Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik, Bd. 4: Das Endspiel*; in the Orthodox Church, Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb*; and, in the Protestant Churches, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1991). In what Chiara says of the “ideas” that are “in” the Word (and are the Word) projected “outside” God during creation, there is the suggestion of the unity of these two levels of the being of the ideas. Going more deeply into this difficult and delicate theological and metaphysical problem in the nineteenth century, Antonio Rosmini gave the following explanation that, while maintaining the essence of the classical tradition, seems to develop it more precisely and in a manner that may be more widely shared: “If one compares the procession of the two divine hypostases from the Trinity’s originating Principle, and the procession of the world, one finds an analogy that demonstrates the same constant law of divine operation, a law founded in the same divine essence: (1) Both in the procession of the Persons and in the procession of the world, one finds the distinctive note of *giving* and *producing* an *other* in which lies the actualization of the divine essence insofar as it is what makes up the first hypostasis; (2) Both in the former procession and in the latter one, the *other* that has been produced *remains in the Principle* from which it proceeds and, insofar as it remains in the Principle, it renders it perfect as a principle, it renders it totally actual; but, at the same

creation is, we could say, a created God. What is created is called to become God. This is the reason, in particular, why God creates humanity. Here is a magnificent passage of Chiara’s:

Humankind therefore is creation and, redeeming humankind, all is redeemed. And besides, it is humankind that is destined to be *another God*. It is humankind that is God’s masterpiece “in the making,” God’s Recreation, His image and likeness, which means: another Him. And here above all God focused His gaze so as to be able to *live* in human creature more than just in divine Nature and experience loving in “a natural way” more than just “in a supernatural way”; in short to be able to make Himself—He, the Creator—become creature, and live the life He had brought about, marrying the creation He had created for Himself by making Himself one with it: *One, an unbreakable Unity*.²⁹

time, the other that has been produced also exists in itself, as something other than the Principle that has produced it, and this *otherness* does not diminish the Principle: on the contrary, it is a necessary condition of the latter’s act and perfection, which lies in giving and producing. Up to this point there exists an analogy and shared law by virtue of which the divine Word is called by St Paul the ‘Firstborn of all the creatures,’ being also their Principle or cause” (*Teosofia* IV, Book III, Section VI, Chap. IV, art. I, 1319, p. 165 of the Rome 1938 edition). In this perspective, it is not metaphysically contradictory to speak both of the “divine ideas” in God and of the “divine ideas” projected “outside” God. In God, they are one in the Word, being the Word; “outside” God, they are distinct and ontologically autonomous, but their true, full being is nothing other than that which, from the beginning, is to be found in God. “Reaching” or “re-joining” it (figuratively speaking) is due to the recapitulation in Christ where the “created ideas” are realized in God while remaining distinct from God. For a lucid, in-depth examination of the question in a Christological-Trinitarian key, see Giuseppe M. Zanghi, *Dio che è Amore* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1991), 139–40.

29. It is important to stress that in this text of Chiara’s are present two themes which are closely connected with the central one of creation and humanity’s destiny as “another God.” First is that of the spousal relationship between Creator and creature thanks to Christ. Second is that of creation as a possibility for God to be not only in

This way of understanding the event of creation by God the Trinity has certain consequences for the way in which nature and the destiny of what has been created are interpreted. Some of them confirm the tradition. Others are more markedly original, which makes them suited to a dialogue with the claims of contemporary philosophical and scientific thought.

The Trinitarian Imprint on Creation

Here is a first consequence. Precisely because it occurs as an extension of the divine processions within the heart of the Trinity (as Aquinas would say), creation itself bears the Trinity's imprint. Not only as far as the ontological structure of every single thing is concerned, as the Christian theological and mystical traditions well know,³⁰ but also as far as the relationship *between* things is concerned. Chiara explains:

Himself (in "the divine nature" as traditional language puts it) but also in/as a creature. There is an important Christological theme in this second case, too. It reminds us of three things. First is the novelty that the event of the Son's Incarnation constitutes for God because, thanks to that, God can live a new experience as God "in a creature." In this regard, Bernard of Clairvaux uses an expression that Klaus Hemmerle often liked to repeat: the Word *quod ab aeterno sciebat per divinitatem, hoc aliter didicit experimentum per carnem*. Second is creation's calling, in Christ, to participate in the life of God Himself. And third is that the unity is thus deeper and more comprehensive than the distinction (or duality) that nevertheless remains between Creator and creature. One should also note the use of the felicitous expression that calls humanity "God's recreation." This means, in the first place, that humanity is God's possibility to "create" by participation another Self (re-create = create again). However, it also means, in a figurative sense, that humanity is what gives joy and "renews" God since "recreation" also means play, rest, and enjoyment. Here, there is perhaps a reference to the figure of Wisdom "rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race" (Prv 8: 31).

30. This is a theme that became central in medieval theology, following the line inaugurated by Augustine in his *De Trinitate*; one need only think of Bonaventure's doctrine of the *vestigia Trinitatis* in the cosmos and the *imago Trinitatis* in humanity.

In creation, everything is Trinity. Things are Trinity in themselves, because their Being is Love, is Father; the Law in them is Light, is Son, Word; and the Life in them is Love, is Holy Spirit. The All shared with the Nothing. And they are Trinity among themselves, because one is Son and Father of the other and, loving each other, all work together in contributing to the One out of which they came.³¹

This simple statement has important repercussions for our understanding of the world that cannot go unnoticed. For example, it has much to add to our understanding at a scientific and cosmological level, where there is a tendency nowadays to highlight the fact that all phenomena are structurally interrelated. But also at a philosophical level,³² it can contribute to the question of the one

31. This, obviously, is a view from the One, from the perspective of eschatological fulfilment. Indeed, the realization of the Trinitarian structure that is already present (as an imprint and a calling) from the beginning in what is created requires the completion of the plan in Christ and humanity's free and creative obedience to it in practice. It is Chiara herself who emphasizes this, commenting on the above text as follows: "Here we see things as they will be: God all in all (see 1 Cor 15:28). And, as the Trinity, the Father will be seen better in the being of things, the Son better in the law that is in them and the Holy Spirit better in the life that flows in them. Indeed, the passage says, 'loving each other, all work together in contributing to the One' so they are in the process of realizing themselves, of becoming divine." All of this is the work of Jesus Forsaken who (as Chiara explains in another context) "redeemed the whole of what is created, where the imprint and the life of the Trinity (in creation we found 'being' and 'law' and 'life' and it is all Love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is brought back by Jesus Forsaken full and complete to the Trinity."

32. Joseph Ratzinger, for example, writes that in the Trinitarian conception of God, "lies concealed a revolution in man's view of the world: the sole dominion of thinking in terms of substance is ended; relation is discovered as an equally valid primordial mode of reality. It becomes possible to surmount what we call today 'objectifying thought'; a new plane of being comes into view. It is probably true to say that the task imposed on philosophy as a result of these facts is far from being completed—so

and the many. In Chiara's vision, the root of the multiplicity of created realities is their unity of being (*esse*) in God, in the Word, from Whom they spring and toward Whom they are orientated. In a well-known text, she uses an enlightening image:

The Father has an expression of Himself outside Himself, made as it were of divergent rays, and an expression within Himself, made of rays that converge in the center, in a point that is Love: God in the infinitely small: the Nothing-All of Love! The Word.³³

In God, everything is One, in a Unity that, being Love, is expressed in the Trinity of Persons. Even the "rays" that express the infinite richness of the Father-Love are, in God, Word in the Word. "Outside God," on the other hand, the "rays" are manifold.

They are distinct and particularized. But by their nature, they tend toward the One who is the Word, from whom they come. After returning within the Word—through Jesus and Jesus Forsaken—they are One: Word in the Word. In humanity's case, however, they are also distinct one from the other and from God, as occurs

much does modern thought depend on the possibilities thus disclosed, without which it would be inconceivable" (Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004], 184). See also Klaus Hemmerle's theses for a Trinitarian ontology, *Thesen zu einer trinitarischen Ontologie* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976). For a closer examination of the various perspectives, see the essays in Andreas Tapken and Piero Coda, eds., *La Trinità e il pensare* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1997) and Lubomir Zak and Piero Coda, eds., *Abitando la Trinità* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998).

33. For a closer examination of the ontological meaning of the multiplicity of the beings created in the light of the One Being of God as tripersonal Love, see the penetrating work by Giuseppe M. Zanghì, "Trinità e creazione" in *Dio che è Amore*, 123–27.

in the Trinity,³⁴ where Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One and distinct.

This same image of the diverging rays that come back to converge through Jesus Forsaken suggests the importance of another of the fundamental dimensions of creation: time. Nowadays, science talks about (creative) "operative time" as "an immanent component of the universe." Now, it is clear that in this dynamic vision of the creation event, time appears to be an inherent reality of the very multiplicity of created things, which need time both to become distinct and to become one according to God's original plan.

Creation, Conservation, and Evolution

There is another consequence that can only be barely mentioned here. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (among others) intuited and tried to explain, there is no insuperable contradiction between the concept of creation and that of evolution when these are properly understood. The fact is that the concept of creation must not be reduced to the anthropomorphic concept of causality as producing things. Adolphe Gesché writes, "Manufacturing is the act of making a thing that is completely determined by and geared towards its own utility. Creating, on the other hand, is making in such a way that the other exists for itself." In this way God "is not the watchmaker intent on making a watch, but the beginner of an adventure." Seen properly, God has created a "creative becoming."³⁵

So God not only sustains what God has created and keeps it continually in being (or, to put it better, continually infuses it with

34. As regards the eschatological dimension of the relationship between God and creation, see Piero Coda, "Viaggiare il Paradiso," *Nuova Umanità* (1997): 211–29.

35. Gesché, *Dieu pour penser*, 75.

being) but God also makes what is created in such a way that in some way it “creates itself,” it develops itself thanks to God’s relationship with it that is always new and always giving rise to new things. There is a very beautiful passage of Chiara’s that highlights this. It emphasizes, in particular, that the dynamic key to creation’s development is that same *kenosis* of love that creation carries within itself like an imprint. This imprint derives its very origin from the love that comes from God:

The plant that grows this year, is born from a death: so from a nothing. But this nothing is positive, in the sense that it is a created nothing. Indeed, the plant could not be born from an uncreated nothing. It needs the seed’s death.

On the one hand, bringing into being is an act of God; on the other hand, once the creature has been brought into being, it develops the dynamic of its existence. The latter is a dynamic of self-annulment that differs according to the various beings.³⁶ That allows creation’s further temporal and evolutionary development. In this sense, Chiara says: “There was only one creation, and God continually creates.”

At the end of this passage, Chiara also talks about human beings and the unique part they are called to play in the history of creation, thanks to their freedom: “Thus God is born from a nothing that is willed, because if I did not exist, God could not be in me.” In this case, too, humanity is brought into being by God so that humanity, as it develops the act of its existence, freely recognizes

36. The self-annulment dynamic that characterizes the creation ultimately derives from the latter’s being imprinted with the Being of God, Who, being Love, a Trinity of Persons in the unity of Being, “is because He is not.”

its own nothingness (i.e., that everything it is, has, and does comes from God) and thus may welcome God in itself, make space for God in itself, so that God lives in His creation through it.

But let us return to the subject of the relationship between creatures by virtue of which one creature is called to annul itself so that the other may be. According to Chiara, this “law” does not only hold for the relationship of temporal development between things belonging to the same species, by virtue of which the new plant springs from the “dead” seed and so on. It also holds good for the whole cosmic drama, in the harmonious hierarchy ordering the different species of beings. Thus the Trinitarian imprint is also reflected in cosmic evolution as a whole, in accordance with the principle that I described at the beginning of this reflection. Chiara writes:

Every inferior creature serves the superior one and says—since the whole universe is a living gospel—“The Father is greater than I,” that is “the superior being is greater than I.” And every created thing has value inasmuch as it behaves towards the one that is superior as Jesus did towards His Father: “My food is to do the will of my Father.” Jesus was nothing other than the Father’s living will. They were one will because Jesus used His own human-divine will to do that of the Father. And He renounced His own will, *He hated it*: “Let your will be done, not mine,” because He hated Himself, loving Himself only for the Father.

Thus the whole drama of the universe is a drama of love that is hate. All things are distinct from one another and destined for communion, for unity. And so each thing is consumed in

the one superior to it (hates itself) and loves the one superior to it in which it loses itself and finds itself again, new.

He who loses his life will find it.

So every human being must lose self in God to become God; each must be pure *will of God* to be manifestation of God here below—that is, love of God.

The universe's created beings are marching towards Unity, towards God, to be made God and they are made God through humankind: a little creation in miniature with a kingdom and a king.

This vision could appear overoptimistic. “Where is the suffering?” one might wonder. “Where are the struggle and conflict?” In reality, everything is viewed here from the vantage point of the One. It is already transformed into its point of arrival. That point is what Teilhard de Chardin, taking up the language found in Revelation, used to call the *omega* point, that is, the Risen Jesus Christ Who has ascended to the bosom of the Father. But it is precisely from this point of arrival that everything acquires its true place and its true meaning.

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