

Creation in Christ and the New Creation in the Mysticism of Chiara Lubich¹

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In a previous article,² after illustrating the theological contexts of the classical tradition and of modern times that form the background of the vision of creation in Chiara Lubich's mysticism, the author looked in particular at the meaning of "creation out of nothing" from the point of view of a Trinitarian ontology of love. Now he focuses with greater clarity upon creation in Christ, taking a closer look at the "new creation" in Christ crucified and risen and at our participation in it.

1. This article is considered a classic interpretation of Chiara Lubich's mysticism referred to as "Paradise '49." It was published in *Nuova Umanità* 32 (2010): 659–72, and has been translated by Callan Slipper, Sophia Institute for Culture.

2. Piero Coda, "God and Creation: Trinity and Creation out of Nothing," *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 4, no. 1 (2015): 4–16.

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Jesus Christ: The Oneness of the Uncreated and the Created

From Paul's letters³ to John's Gospel,⁴ from the Letter to the Hebrews⁵ to the book of Revelation,⁶ the New Testament witness is unanimous about the doctrine (undoubtedly original to the Christian faith) of creation "in Christ." In the Letter to the Colossians, to give just one example, Jesus is not only said to be "the image of the invisible God" but also "the firstborn of all creation," and it is emphasized that all things were created in Him, through Him, and for Him. Scholastic theology, taking up and transforming the language of Greek philosophy, would later speak about Jesus's role in creation as its exemplary, efficient, and final cause. The world, therefore, was created by God in view of Christ, indeed, "in" Christ. Outside of Him no created thing is thinkable and nothing can exist.

It should be noted, furthermore, that the New Testament does not just speak about the Word but about Jesus, the Word incarnate. Therefore it is Jesus (true God and true man) who is the center of God's project in creation. This is the vision that Chiara expresses with great clarity in 1949:

The Kingdom of Heaven is within the bosom of the Father. 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

3. See, e.g., 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:15–17.

4. Jn 1:1–14.

5. Heb 1:1–3.

6. Rv 3:14.

that is Love: God in the infinitely small: the Nothing-All of Love! The Word. The divergent rays are Jesus.

By means of Jesus the Father reaches all his children outside Himself in whatever point they are to be found.⁷

And again, echoing the New Testament:

For him all things were made. All that is created is nothing but Jesus unfolded, as the rainbow is the opening fan of colors that unfold the white. The stars, the plants, the sun, the moon, the sea, the mountains, the birds, all creatures and man are summed up in Jesus.

In the first of these quotations, thanks to the spatial symbolism of “within” and “outside” and of “convergent” and “divergent” rays, two levels can be distinguished: that of the life of God in Godself and that of creation, in other words, that of eternity and that of time. It should be noted that with reference to the “divergent rays,” that is, of the expression of God “outside Himself,” Jesus is spoken about in time. Bearing this mind, it can be said that what Chiara writes is set within the perspective of the New Testament and the church’s dogmatic tradition. According to this perspective, to be precise we must speak of the pre-existence (at the level of the life of God) of the Person of the Word who forever (in eternity) is in relation with the wholly free event of creation—even though, from the point of view of time, the Word was incarnate only in “the fullness of time.”

7. From an unpublished text of 1949. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Chiara Lubich are taken from unpublished texts written in 1949.

It is in this perspective that Paul affirms, as has already been noted, that “in him all things in heaven and on earth were created . . . and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17). This does not refer simply to the Word, but to the Word incarnate. God in creating, in fact, aims at Jesus Christ as the meaning and goal of creation (“Christ as all and in all”; see Col 3:11). This means that every created thing bears in itself, as an openness, a longing, a tension, the inchoate “form” of Jesus Christ, which the historical person of Jesus, in the event of his incarnation and death/resurrection/pouring out of the Holy Spirit, will actualize and fulfill with his fullness.

The final cause of creation thus exercises its own specific and powerful effect. Hans Urs von Balthasar, looking at things more from above, speaks of the “Christo-typical” form of every creature. Karl Rahner, looking at things more from below, speaks of a “supernatural existential” form inherent in every human person, even “before” and “outside” coming within the explicitly experienced (categorical, as Rahner puts it) influence of Jesus Christ.

We must therefore recognize the presence and the salvific effect of the event of Jesus Christ, which is extended to the whole of time. As Chiara writes: “By means of Jesus the Father reaches all his children outside Himself *in whatever point* they are to be found.” The presence and the action of God “outside Himself” are always mediated—mysteriously but really—by Jesus Christ crucified and risen in his Spirit. Jesus, the Word incarnate crucified and risen, is the point where God’s “internal” and “external” (to use a spatial metaphor), the eternal and the temporal, touch and join together while remaining distinct. God, so to speak, “goes out of Godself” in Jesus and we enter into God in Jesus.

Therefore, from the point of view of temporality, a mysterious but real efficacy is given to the Jesus Christ event, which is located

historically, as stated above, in “the fullness of time,” not only *after* Jesus (as an event that takes place in time) but also *before* him. It is an efficacy that is not only eschatological and anticipatory (reaching forward) but also protological and retroactive (reaching back). At the same time, it is also necessary—so as not to render vain the reality of temporal succession—to distinguish between the efficacy he exercises before the historical-eschatological event of his incarnation from the efficacy he exercises after it.

It seems to me that the article of faith of Jesus’s descent into Hell, in particular, should be interpreted in this way. Jesus in his death reaches also those who lived before him, to communicate redemption to them and freely guide them with his Risen Self into the bosom of the Father. In this way, as the Word incarnate, crucified and risen, he realizes in himself the contemporaneous reality of all times. Hence all human beings, before and after him, participate in the salvation that comes from him. Did not Jesus exclaim: “Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he saw it and was glad” (Jn 8:56)?⁸ The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, in my opinion, should also be interpreted in this light as we shall see. Mary was preserved from original sin *intuitu meritorum Christi*, in consideration of the merits of Christ. It is not some kind of ideal foretaste of the redemption that will take place by means of Christ but the mysterious and unique retroactive efficacy of the death/resurrection of Jesus that makes possible Mary’s divine maternity, which, in terms of time, takes place before the death/resurrection of Jesus.

It is a mystery that will have to be studied in depth. And this demands, in particular, a new understanding of the relationship

8. See Giovanni Ancona, *Disceso agli inferi: Storia e interpretazione di un articolo di fede* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1999).

between eternity and time and of the very meaning of eternity and time in the light of the Jesus Christ event. Jesus, indeed, is presented by Chiara as the Oneness of the Uncreated and the created; or, in terms well known to theological and mystical tradition, as the “consummated marriage” between God and creation.⁹

Mary, Creation in Synthesis that Marries the Creator

But for the Jesus event to be possible and actually to happen, it is necessary to have, through the free necessity of love, the presence and the *fiat* of Mary. The intrinsically Marian dimension of creation is rooted precisely here—and so in reference to and, as we shall see, in dependence upon the Christological mystery. While not unknown to tradition,¹⁰ this dimension acquires in Chiara’s understanding a particular power as part of an overall understanding of God’s creative and salvific plan. Mary, seen in her essential role within the event of the incarnation, is presented as in fact “the whole of creation in synthesis at the climax of its beauty, when it is presented as bride to its Creator” (and this by a retroactive action of the redemption).

Picking up again the nuptial image recalled previously, if Jesus is the fruit of the marriage of God and humanity, then Mary is the creation that gives itself as the bride of the Creator, offering her immaculate flesh to God the Father so that he can beget, in the Holy Spirit, his Son as man. In reality, if Jesus is the Oneness of the Uncreated and the created, it is necessary not only that God

9. I will not look further into the central theme in this context of Jesus the Mediator, because it has already been studied by Hubertus Blaumeiser in “Un mediatore che è nulla,” *Nuova Umanità* 20 (1998): 385–407.

10. This is a theme that is currently being reconsidered theologically, especially in an Orthodox context from the point of view of “Sophiology” (see Sergei Bulgakov, *Bride of the Lamb* [Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2002]).

should give Godself—through the Word in the Spirit—to creation but also that creation, in a free response, should give itself to God. This happens by means of Mary.

On the other hand, as Chiara notes, this is only possible retroactively. It is a result of the redemption wrought by Christ, as is affirmed by the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.¹¹ This becomes at least to some extent comprehensible if we think of the centrality of the Christ in the event of creation, which makes ontologically possible various temporally distinct and successive phases and dimensions.

Jesus Forsaken and the New Creation

In addition Chiara has an original understanding of Jesus Forsaken as the climax and expression in synthesis of the mystery of Jesus and, as a result, of the entire event of creation.¹² All of this is deeply in accord with the biblical witness. The concept of “new creation” that we find in the New Testament, especially in the Pauline corpus (see 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), indicates that Jesus Christ is the new humanity who is created in conformity with God’s project that is fully realized in the paschal event and who, through faith and baptism, clothes the human person with himself (see 1 Cor 15:45–49; Eph 2:14–16, 4:22–24).

11. Pius IX’s Bull, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854) declared as revealed by God that “the Most Blessed Virgin Mary at the first moment of her conception was, by singular grace and privilege of the Omnipotent God, in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ [*intuitu meritorum Christi Jesu*], Savior of the Human race, preserved from all stains of original sin.” See Piero Coda, “Maria e la Trinità: A 150 anni dal dogma dell’Immacolata Concezione,” *PATH 3* (2004): 589–605.

12. See Stefan Tobler, *Tutto il vangelo in quel grido: Gesù abbandonato nei testi di Chiara Lubich* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2009); Florence Gillet, *La scelta di Gesù Abbandonato: Nella prospettiva teologica di Chiara Lubich* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2009).

Now, Jesus Forsaken, for Chiara, is Jesus who fully actualizes the pattern of his being, God’s plan for him, his “design,” as he makes real in himself the unity of the Uncreated and the created, and out of himself gives rise to the new creation. Chiara sees this central event of the mystery of creation that is made actual in Jesus Forsaken under two complementary and interrelated dimensions that are rich in meaning and future possibilities.

In the first, Jesus Forsaken is described as the one by whom God the Father in the Holy Spirit makes his creature participate in his very own Being. Chiara writes:

[Jesus Forsaken] is the Creator who makes Himself Non-Being, Him, Being, to give Himself in participation to Creation. . . . He is the Creator and of the Creator given in participation to Creation, who with this becomes Creator.

What happens in Jesus’s forsakenness? Jesus, out of love for the Father and for human beings, feeling himself detached from the Father, out of love “loses” the divine link making him one with the Father, namely, the Holy Spirit. But in this very way not only does he find this link again in himself (in the event of the resurrection where his humanity is also glorified by the Spirit) but he also makes human beings participate in it. Thus, thanks to the gift of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Forsaken makes creation participate in the Being of the Creator.

Here, the other dimension (that of salvation) comes into play, and it allows us to go still further in an understanding of the dynamism of this event. The Church Fathers, and following them the great thinkers of the Middle Ages, had the insight that the Word

of God in becoming man assumed human nature in its universality even though this took place, as explained also by Saint Thomas, by means of a particular individual. For this reason he could exercise a redemptive influence upon all humans of all times.¹³ An echo of this teaching can be found in the Second Vatican Council, where *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that “by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.”¹⁴

The mystery of Jesus Forsaken allows us to penetrate the dynamic of the mysterious but real communion of the Word with every human being, not just by means of the universality of the human nature he assumes in the incarnation—a dimension to

13. The Fathers of the Church emphasized how the event of the incarnation of the Word recapitulated the universe. Among the Greek Fathers, Cyril of Alexandria states that “all human nature was in Christ through the fact of his being human” (Commentary on John, 24; PL 10, 66). Among the Latin Fathers, Hilary of Poitiers said he was born of Virgin and the Holy Spirit so that “He might take to Himself from the Virgin the fleshly nature, and that through this commingling there might come into being one hallowed Body of all humanity” (*On the Trinity*, 2, 24; PL 10, 66). At the close of the patristic age, Maximus the Confessor gave a highly meaningful summary, saying that God wishes “that the multitude of beings, separated one from the other by their natures, come toward unity, converging with each other in the one nature of man, and that he himself in this way might become all in all,” which takes place, indeed, through the incarnation of the Word (*Ambigua*; PG 91, 1092C). On the other hand, it should never be forgotten that the incarnation, for the Fathers too, is always understood in a dynamic relation to the paschal event. On this important theme see Marcello Bordon, “L’evento dell’incarnazione e la sua funzione salvifica universale nell’intera umanità,” in *Gesù di Nazaret Signore e Cristo*, 3 (Rome: Herder-PUL 1986), 862–871; Bernard Sesboué, “Incarnazione e/o mistero pasquale,” in *Gesù Cristo: l’unico mediatore* (Cinisello Balsamo: Ed. Paoline, 1991), 242ff. While he was within this same tradition, Saint Thomas gave a further and more precise explanation of this insight, saying that “The incarnate Son of God is the common Savior of all, not by a generic or specific community, such as is attributed to the nature separated from the individuals, but by a community of cause, whereby the incarnate Son of God is the universal cause of human salvation” (*Summa Theologica*, III, q. 4., a. 5, ad 1).

14. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

which past culture until Medieval times was particularly sensitive. But we also see the Word in the particularity of the concrete existence of each individual human being that Jesus reached with his forsakenness. This is a dimension that, beginning with the “critique of the universals” at the end of the Medieval period, has become increasingly important through the centuries of modernity—an approach that is typical of Judeo-Christian revelation. Chiara explains:

Never was Jesus so much man as when he was Jesus Forsaken. Indeed, while previously He was seen to be Man, now He was a man. Indeed, being—because He was God—universal Man, when He came to be detached from God, He remained a particular man. But, in not ceasing to be God, He divinized the particular. For this reason He, being God, makes the particular become God and demonstrates how in a particular man there can be contained the Universal. Participating, therefore, in the divine Life does not mean for us to receive a part of it, but to have all of it in us who are particular.

This explanation links to what has already been said about the “divergent” rays in creation that return to being “convergent” in the bosom of the Father by means of Jesus. We could say that it is precisely by means of Jesus Forsaken’s becoming one with each human being in his or her particularity that the divergent rays can converge, because they are gathered into one by him and in him. They do not lose their identity but become one in their distinction, because they are, each one, fully clothed with the one Christ. In this sense, Jesus Forsaken is the decisive “turning point” of the

history of creation, so much so that he can be called, in Chiara's words, "the Mother of Creation."

None of this sets aside the fact that Jesus Forsaken is also the key to understanding the meaning of suffering in creation's process of becoming and to humanity's redemption from sin. A consideration of these issues would demand a separate investigation.¹⁵ Here, we will conclude by examining the last point we said we would consider.

Creation "in" God the Trinity

The reality of the new creation, fruit of Jesus Forsaken, is made manifest in the resurrection of Jesus. It is then manifested in us through our being grafted into the life of the Risen Lord by means of faith in him and of baptism.

The Eucharist and the Divinization of Creation

We participate in the fullest way in the life of the Risen Christ in history by means of the Eucharist. It, in fact, makes us concorporeal and consanguineal with Him, sharing with us the gift of the Holy Spirit. By means of the Eucharist, already in this world creation experiences the fruit of the redemption and of the divinization brought about by Jesus. The philosopher Maurice Blondel, with reference to the ontological meaning of the Eucharist for the realization in Christ of the event of creation, wrote:

We must all give ourselves birth by giving birth to God in us. . . . The gift which religious life brings [a man] is so

15. There are some remarks in my contribution to the Associazione Teologica Italiana (the Association of Italian Theologians), "Il Cristo crocifisso e abbandonato: Redenzione della libertà e nuova creazione," Saturnino Muratore (ed.), *Futuro del cosmo: Futuro dell'uomo* (Padua: Messaggero 1997), 191–232.

closely incorporated into his substance that human nature becomes capable of producing and creating in some way the One from whom it has everything, as if at one and the same time the donor wanted to have everything from the donee, as if man, summoned finally to satisfy the excess of his willing, became, according to the expression of Saint Thomas, "the God of his God."¹⁶

In some way, the Eucharist is shown as a real foretaste and a prophetic and effective sign of what the whole creation is destined to become by means of Jesus and human beings nourished on Him-Eucharist, to become indeed the created expression of God. As Chiara explains it, creation, which is the work of God who is Love, cannot but also be made Love and so be Eucharist: the expression of God that has the value of God. The Eucharist has, therefore, a cosmic destiny, or, better, the whole cosmos has a Eucharistic vocation.¹⁷ This is one of the great insights of Teilhard de Chardin:

16. Maurice Blondel, *Action: Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice* (South Bend, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 386.

17. In the words of the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas: "[T]he Eucharist . . . is the most dramatic evidence of a meeting in human existence here and now between the eschaton and history, between the perfect and the relative. . . . This eschatological invasion is not an historical development that one can comprehend logically and by experience; it is the descent of the Holy Spirit, by epiclesis—this epiclesis that is so fundamental and so characteristic of the Orthodox Eucharist—that transfigures the 'present age' and transforms it in Christ into 'a new creation.' This descent from heaven to earth, which makes possible the ascent of the earth to the heavenly throne, fills the earth with light, with grace and with joy, and makes the feast of the Liturgy a solemn celebration from which the faithful return to the world full of joy and charism. . . . Therefore the Eucharist will always open the way not to the dream of a gradual perfection of the world, but to the demand for heroic asceticism, an experience of kenosis and of the cross, the only way in which it is possible to live the Eucharist in the world until the victory of the Resurrection at the end of time. At the same time,

As our humanity assimilates the material world, and as the Host assimilates our humanity, the eucharistic transformation goes beyond and completes the transubstantiation of the bread on the altar. Step by step it irresistibly invades the universe. . . . In a secondary and generalized sense, but in a true sense, the sacramental Species are formed by the totality of the world, and the duration of the creation is the time needed for its consecration.¹⁸

The Life of Unity and “Trinitization”

What the Eucharist produces as grace in creation, by means of the humanity that is Christified by it, is fully actualized in the life of unity. Being one with God and among created persons, the fruit of Jesus Forsaken participated in through the Eucharist, becomes a lived experience for us in the life of unity. This life of unity means living “trinitarian relationships,” in the sense that created persons, grafted into Christ, are called to live according to the pattern of the Trinity, living out mutual love through the total gift of self in Jesus Forsaken. But, more profoundly still, at its root it means participating in the very dynamism of God, who is Three and One. This is “trinitization”: being made one in Jesus and being made distinct as other Jesuses if we are united and insofar as we are united. As Chiara explains:

the Eucharist offers the world the experience of this eschatological dimension that penetrates history in the eucharistic communion and makes possible our deification in space and time” (John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* [London and New York: T & T Clark, 2011], 117–18).

18. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu: An Essay on the Interior Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 125–6. See Franco Bisio, “Cristogenesi: Croce e Trinità in Teilhard de Chardin,” Piero Coda and Andreas Tapken (eds), *La Trinità e il pensare* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1997), 229–57.

Our Ideal: Jesus Forsaken gives us the possibility of being perfect as the Father even though we are particular human beings. . . . But this is because we put unity at the basis—“*ante omnia*”—and we become distinguished from one another after being united with one another. That is, we become distinguished as Jesus, and hence God, distinct from God, God by participation.

Trinitization, clearly, is not only a matter of the relations of each created person with God and in God with other created persons, but it is also a matter of the Trinitarian relationship that, through Jesus and Jesus Forsaken, is established between the Creator and the creation seen as “one.”¹⁹ In Jesus Forsaken, in fact, there comes about the marriage of the Creator with the created, that marriage which will be consummated in the Parousia:

The Church is the Bride of Christ because He has made it participate in His Spirit; the Creation is the Bride of the Creator because the Creator²⁰ has given it His *Being*: Love.

Thus “between the two is the Love *of the Trinity*, and God loves Creation and is loved back in the *Perfection of Unity*²¹ as was the Testament of Jesus. They love one another as God loves Himself.”

This Trinitarian relation between the Creator and creation finds its eschatological icon already realized in Mary, whom the faith of the Roman Catholic Church contemplates as Assumed

19. See Piero Coda, “Creatio ex nihilo amoris: Per una lettura trinitaria del principio di creazione,” Stefano Moriggi and Elio Sindoni (eds), *Perché esiste qualcosa invece di nulla? Vuoto, Nulla, Zero* (Castel Bolognese: ITACA, 2004), 29–40.

20. “That is, God through Jesus,” Chiara explains.

21. “Because creation is divinized by Him” (in terms Chiara uses).

in Heaven.²² More could be said here. But following the vision of faith that Mary is the Mother of God, Chiara says that she “does not reassume in Herself only the Creation, but the uncreated and the created universe.” Even though her role in the history of salvation remains unique and unrepeatably, She, by means of her divine maternity, through the grace of the Holy Spirit giving birth in her bodiliness to the One who created her, shows us the vocation of all: created by God in order to give birth to God in us—a created God.

Trinitarian Eschaton: “God all in all”

The event of creation, thus, reaches its fulfilment. And it is possible to glimpse the meaning of Paul’s striking and wonderful eschatological vision of God as “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). This is not the pantheistic effect of a God who cancels creation in the divine self, but the fulfilment of the prayer of Jesus to the Father: “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (Jn 17:21). As Chiara concludes:

In this unity each thing is within the Bosom of the Father and each thing is outside the Father and contains the Father. Indeed, since each thing is within the Son, within the Word, it is with the Word in the bosom of the Father (“I in you”) and embraces the Father (“You in me”). In this way in the end all was God: God in Himself and God in creation. Two but made one by Jesus the Mediator. God therefore, in creating, did not do anything but clothe the

nothing with Himself, sharing with the nothing Himself. God is He who is. All that is is God—God: the Creator; God: the Creation.

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22. See Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings* (New York: New City Press, 2007), 209–14, esp., 212–13.