

# Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians

## Part III: The Holy Spirit, the Son of God, and the Cosmos<sup>1</sup>

G rard Ross   
Sophia University Institute

*The author explores Chiara Lubich's mystical writings in light of the Letter to the Ephesians, focusing on the Holy Spirit, the Risen*

---

1. This article constitutes the third part of a now famous study, in four parts, entitled "Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise'49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians." It proposes to collect the points of contact between Lubich's Paradise '49 and the Letter to the Ephesians, and to explore the grand themes of faith that emerged from both of these writings, in particular God, the Word, ecclesiology, and ethics. For an introduction to the contemplative experience of 1949, see the first issue of *Claritas*, which contains a contextualizing editorial essay, several other interpretive essays, and the opening text of Lubich's Paradise '49. The first and second parts Ross 's study can be accessed at *Claritas* 5. This third article by Rosse was first published in Italian in *Nuova Umanit * 31 (2009): 691–713. Translation is by Giovanna Czander (Dominican College).

---

Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture, Vol. 5, No. 2 (October 2016)  
5–19   2016

*Christ, the church, and the cosmos. The Holy Spirit is seen as creating the conditions for unity between persons, in the church and throughout the cosmos, according to the pattern of the Trinity, that shows the "mothering face of God." The Risen Christ is presented in his cosmic dimension, which brings creation to its eschatological recapitulation, a "marriage of the Uncreated and the created." The Risen Christ within the church is presented in terms of his upward movement to its fulfillment (pleroma) in God, bringing in its recapitulation fullness of life to humankind and all creation. In addressing these topics, the author quotes both the Letter to the Ephesians and the writings of Chiara Lubich.*

### The Holy Spirit

The fact that the Letter to the Ephesians mentions the Holy Spirit is remarkable, especially since the Letter to the Colossians, which comes right after it, does not mention the Holy Spirit at all. Unlike the Letter to the Colossians, the Letter to the Ephesians emphasizes the function of the Holy Spirit and expresses a truly "Trinitarian" perspective.

### *The Holy Spirit and God's Design*

The author of the letter does not reflect directly on the Third Divine Person and the Holy Spirit's role within the Trinity. In this regard, Chiara's writing is a witness to the richness of a whole doctrinal tradition that has developed in the church. Furthermore, since it is a mystical experience, the Holy Spirit becomes "alive," is experienced, and thus avoids the risk of being an abstract concept in the doctrine on God. For example, consider the experience of the kiss (with which other mystics such as St. Bernard or William of Saint-Thierry are familiar): "I was touched again by the Holy

Spirit, whose kiss made me feel a profound pain in my heart.”<sup>2</sup> The Holy Spirit’s kiss expresses direct contact with the Divine, just as marriage expresses the fullness of a relationship, experienced by the Church-Bride (Eph 5:21–33). Shortly before this experience, Chiara writes: “We did not yet know the Holy Spirit. He had given place to his Bride to enclose Her, then, in being manifested, as fourth in the Trinity.”

Chiara talks clearly about a “felt,” experienced knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Her remarkable expression should be noted: “The Holy Spirit *closes the circle*” within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is understood as the manifestation more *ad extra* of God, as the One who brings to completion God’s action. The Holy Spirit is “the ultimate expression of God; the Holy Spirit closes the circle.” The Holy Spirit is “third” not because the Spirit is inferior to the other divine Persons but because in the Holy Spirit, Father and Son love each other. The Holy Spirit brings about unity between them. At the beginning and at the end, the Third Person is the eternal perfection of the Trinitarian movement.

The Holy Spirit has the same function in salvation history: It is the Spirit who inserts believers into the Communion between the Father and the Son. From this perspective, the ideas in Ephesians are not so different. In fact, the Holy Spirit is mentioned last both in the conclusion of the great benediction in the first chapter and in the final part of the central section of the letter (Eph 2:22). The Holy Spirit is like the place where the Trinitarian action toward humanity happens and is completed.

---

2. From Chiara Lubich’s notes. Unless otherwise stated, all references to Chiara’s writings are to these notes from 1949, which are as yet unpublished. Translations of all texts from 1949, which are provisional, have been done by Callan Slipper and Thomas Masters.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, we find relevant concepts that are found also in Chiara’s experience. The introduction of the Holy Spirit as “down payment of our inheritance” (Eph 1:14) comes from Paul (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). The concept of a down payment is taken from the business world and here indicates a payment that guarantees and provides a foretaste of Paradise. As mentioned previously, it is not a sum borrowed to be returned later but a free installment, given permanently, that accompanies the believer until the final completion.

Therefore, a Christian can live the future in the present time of history: The “mystical” grace brings about in the experience of the senses what is believed by faith, an installment of Paradise. It is the Holy Spirit who made possible and brought about the mystical vision of the whole Paradise<sup>49</sup>. He anticipates the Eschaton both as faith experience and, thanks to a special grace, as mystical experience. As a consequence, Chiara recognizes that the Holy Spirit has the function of making known, of enlightening human beings, and sees the Spirit at work in the Light (*Claritas*) that the Father gives to the Word and is communicated to the seer (see Jn 17:22).

This is consistent with our understanding of the letter: The Holy Spirit enlightens the apostle on the “mystery of Christ,” the divine plan concealed up to that point that needs to be shared with the ecclesial “us” (Eph 3:5f). The author prays from the start, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him” (Eph 1:17). The author asks for Christians the gift of the Spirit. This gift is given with baptism but is a Presence that needs to remain active during the whole existence of believers in order to allow them to penetrate more in the deep existential understanding of God and of God’s presence behind things (wisdom). But in Christian existence there may be

some powerful moments, such as the encounter with a charism of light and therefore also a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit.

In the Divine Design of bringing humanity to God, into the bosom of the Father, the Holy Spirit has a specific role. It is “in the Holy Spirit” and through the mediation of Christ that we have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). The Spirit is the space of our encounter with God, the One who “closes the circle,” to use Chiara’s term. So it is the Holy Spirit who makes one experience the *Abba* as a child, as Paul says (Gal 4:6).

Chiara writes of the experience of entering into the bosom of the Father: “And from my mouth came forth expressed by the Spirit a single Word: Father! And all was accomplished. Nothing more was lacking.” Nothing is lacking here: “The circle is closed,” but now it includes humanity and creation. This more cosmic vision is made explicit in the following text: “I experienced the elation of being at the peak of the pyramid of all creation . . . where the Spirit says through our mouth: *Abba-Father*.” The Holy Spirit appears at the end of the “recapitulation of everything in Christ.”

From a different perspective, and always related to the experience of entering into the bosom of the Father, the Letter to the Ephesians confirms that the Holy Spirit, being “the Spirit of the Son” (Gal 4:6), as Paul writes, assimilates Christians to Christ from within. The Spirit is the inner power that works in the depths of a baptized person (Eph 3:16), where Christ dwells (Eph 3:17).

### *The Holy Spirit in Relation to the Church and the Life of Unity*

With respect to the church, the Letter reminds us of the image of the holy temple (in Paul: 1 Cor 3:16f) “in whom you also are

built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).<sup>3</sup> It is a live temple, permeated by the Spirit of the Risen One who unites and distinguishes; it is the link of continuity and the power of growth. In the Spirit, the Trinity opened its intimate life of Communion in order to “close the circle,” bringing the church, and with it humanity, within the Communion.

This teaching belongs to the doctrinal heritage of the church and is not missing in Chiara’s mystical reflection: “It is with the descent of the Holy Spirit . . . that Mary became Jesus.” In more general terms, “Whoever is born again in the Spirit is *another Jesus*” (remembering that for Chiara “being Jesus” is lived as “church,” that is, in actualized unity). Therefore, the role of the Holy Spirit as bond of unity is of central importance to Chiara:

God is interested in the divine bond, the Holy Spirit, the One who makes us children of God and brothers and sisters of one another, the sole bond of fraternity; for us to have this bond we need to break the others that hinder: to break, and, that is, to burn them with the Holy Spirit, who is a consuming Fire. He, wishing to work a second birth in us (the birth that makes us children of God in perfect unity between the human being and grace, God given through participation), consumes all in Himself, divinizing, setting all ablaze, translating all into Fire, into God, into true children of God as Jesus.

---

3. “In the Spirit” is missing in the NRSV but present in the Greek text followed by Rossé. [Translator’s note]

This is an essential text for understanding how Chiara sees the role of the Holy Spirit with regard to the life of unity. It is on the “nothingness” of mutual love that the Spirit can best perform his divine role. This is deeply consistent with Paul’s thoughts: God revealed Godself as the one “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Rm 4:17).

God can only “create” out of “nothingness” as the space in which the Holy Spirit works. Only the Holy Spirit creates perfect unity, on the pattern of the Trinity (being *One* in the fullness of distinction) and in communion with the Trinity (divinization). Where there is unity, the “new creation” is being realized. It is possible now to interpret some of Chiara’s writings and to find in them a recurring concept: “The Holy Spirit is only there where nothing else is,” that is, whenever reciprocity is fully lived, unity is perfect, divine, without falling into uniformity, without exiting the human sphere where God has entered, and without escaping from daily life. Another passage of Chiara’s in this regard reads:

Love is to be distilled all the way to being only Holy Spirit. It is distilled by passing it through Jesus Forsaken. Jesus Forsaken is the nothing, is the point and through the point (= Love reduced to the extreme, having given everything) passes only Simplicity that is God: Love.

Distilling Love, reducing it to extreme nothingness, does not mean lessening it, or calculating what is owed, but making it go through one’s brothers and sisters, being open to them as “non-being” that takes away as much as possible of the pollution caused by one’s ways of seeing, acting, and thinking.

Our most important task is to maintain the chastity of God and that is: maintain love in our hearts as purely and solely Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the Trinity is the Relationship of the Two, hence their Love and Purification. . . . The Spirit is the fire that purifies by burning. Hence, to be pure we need not deprive our heart and repress the love in it. We need to enlarge it to the measure of the Heart of Jesus and love everyone.<sup>4</sup>

The “chastity of God” is love lived out in the measure of Jesus Forsaken. This entails a love that is completely open to the other, to all others, and therefore “purified” from one’s own self-centeredness. Giving “everything” to God means giving the God we have within (the “distilled” love that is the Holy Spirit) to the other. Therefore, *agape*-love can give to each one what *eros*-love (though good) is not capable of giving: the richness that quenches the thirst for the infinite present in each heart and mediates God’s love for all brothers and sisters.

I would like to conclude with a page from Chiara, an experience rich in content that she had on July 26, 1949:

I went into church for the usual meditation with the souls who made up the Soul with me, and looking at the tabernacle I waited, upon the emptiness of myself, for God to send his light. I had the impression that in the tabernacle Jesus was breathing and that this breath, almost a puff of air, came toward me. I lifted up my head to receive it on my

---

4. Chiara explains: “In the sense of being ‘their Distinction.’ In the Trinity the Holy Spirit is Love, in which there is the maximum unity and the maximum distinction among the divine Persons.”

face. (It was not something physical.) When this puff of air, rising up above me was between me and the statue of Mary most holy that stood in a niche on the right of the High Altar, it materialized—to the eyes of my soul—as a dove, about twenty centimeters across, with its wings outspread. It circled a few times above my head and it was in a position to shed light. But it did not. Confused, I understood it to be the Holy Spirit and as the Holy Spirit it was all the breath of Jesus, all His Warmth, His Life, and as it were it formed the atmosphere of Heaven, with which the whole of Heaven is filled, and that it was a waft of air, a gentle breeze.

In this vision, we see a rich teaching on the Holy Spirit: in the Christian tradition<sup>5</sup> the dove has always been considered a symbol of the Holy Spirit (as in the baptism of Jesus); the metaphor of the “wind” is often linked to the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> as in the powerful wind at Pentecost (Acts 2:2); there is also the saying “the Spirit blows where it chooses” (Jn 3:8). The gentle breeze brings to mind God’s self-revelation to the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 19:12). The Holy Spirit as “the breath of Jesus,” that is, as *ruach* or *pneuma* coming from Christ, recalls the Risen Jesus breathing on his disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn 20:22).

The Holy Spirit is also the Warmth and Life of Christ: Here the motherly face of God appears. He is also like “the air in Heaven”: He is not seen but brings about life, just like the space that “closes the circle” within the Trinity, the bosom of the Father, images that recall the formula *in one Spirit* in Ephesians 2:18.

5. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God is never presented in the form of a dove.

6. Compare to the Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek *pneuma*, whose meaning is “puff” or “wind.”

## The Son of God

I do not intend to illustrate the whole Christology present in the Letter to the Ephesians but would like to focus on the place and eschatological role that Christ has in it.

### *The Risen Jesus: Head of the Church and the Cosmos*

For the author of the letter, Christ Jesus or Christ or the Lord Jesus Christ<sup>7</sup> is always the Risen Jesus, the One whom resurrection has set above all things and in relationship with each thing. The resurrection is the divine glorification of Jesus, an event that is very personal but has repercussions throughout the whole universe. Jesus is the One who, from eternity in which the Father lives, reveals, brings about, and brings to completion the loving Design that the Father has conceived in him, in favor of humanity and creation. Through the resurrection, therefore, Jesus has become the eschatological Sovereign of the world: This is the cosmic dimension that is typical of Colossians and Ephesians. The letter is familiar with the term “the Lord” and the image of “sitting at the right hand of God,” which were already church traditions that indicated this sovereignty.

After the Letter to the Colossians, to express the Lordness of Christ, the author also uses the metaphor of “Head”: God gave Christ as the Head of the Church, which is his Body. This is stated in Ephesians 1:20–22:

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and

7. Only once, in Eph 4:13, is he called “Son of God”; in Eph 1:6, “the Beloved.”

dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church.

The text emphasizes the royal enthronement, through the resurrection, that gives Christ power over the cosmic powers. The mythological language should not overpower the value of the statement. Set “in the heavenly places,” Christ belongs to the realm of the Divine, where the Father is. The relationship he has with the universe is the same as God’s. Therefore Christ rules also the hidden powers.<sup>8</sup> At the time, this sounded like a true liberation from a world perceived as hostile, in which human beings saw themselves as dominated by fate, by absurdity, and by hatred. These cosmic powers now can no longer be an obstacle to a direct relationship with God, which is granted by the only Mediator. These invisible powers exist on earth even today, hiding under different names. These powers aim to take possession of human beings: They are materialism, consumerism, scientism, various ideologies, and so on. Proclaiming the Sovereignty of the Risen Christ over these powers—the author repeats it in Ephesians 6:12—means giving back to the world its true essence of “creation” oriented toward a goal, and giving back to human beings their place, willed by God, in creation.

As the abovementioned text (Eph 1:20–22) states, it is as universal Sovereign, as ruler of the cosmic powers, that Christ is given

---

8. According to Eph 2:2, these occupy the air, thus making an obstacle to the relationship of human beings with Heaven. The language is mystical but expresses a religious-existential reality: a person controlled by evil who cannot succeed in bringing about communion.

by God to the church as its Head. There is a close relationship between the church and the cosmos in Christ. In him, the cosmic reality and the ecclesial reality are in a relationship: not only at the level of creation (humanity as the synthesis of creation) but also at the eschatological level.

The privileged relationship with the Head is given to the church, which is his only Body. As Head of his Body, Christ exerts his Sovereignty not only by dominating the cosmic powers and freeing humanity from them but also by taking care of and nourishing his Body, the church (Eph 4:15). The Head is therefore also the source of life and cohesion. From the Head comes the vital force that runs through the whole Body, gives it life, holds it together, and makes it grow. The sovereignty of the Risen Christ entails also Christ’s omnipresence in time and space. Resurrection puts him at the beginning (“he chose us *in Christ* before the foundation of the world” Eph 1:4) and at the conclusion as recapitulation of creation (Eph 1:10). The author applies an eschatological exegesis of Psalm 68:19 and concludes: “He who descended is the same one who ascended far above the heavens, so that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:10, see also vv 7–10).

By stating that the one who descended “into the lower parts of the earth” (v 9) is the same one who ascended “far above the heavens,” he means that Christ went from one extreme end of the universe to the other, occupying all the space that up to that point had been occupied by the cosmic powers. Another reading is possible. The extreme ends touched by Jesus hint at his solidarity with humanity to the very end (the cross) and his exaltation in the reality of God (according to the pattern annihilation-glorification: see Phil 2:6–11). The extreme ends then are humanity far from God, on the one hand, and the bosom of the Father, on the other. Jesus

crucified and risen envelops everything with his presence: He is capable of bringing ahead God's plan of bringing everything in unity with God.

### *The Function of Recapitulating*

After this introduction on the resurrection of Jesus according to the perspective of Ephesians, we can look at the eschatological function of recapitulation given by the Father to the Risen Christ.<sup>9</sup> Let me go back to the double meaning of the verb *recapitulate*: “to put under the same head” and “to gather, collect things together.” This implies the convergence of multiplicity toward Christ as the center of unity. The author of the letter talks about recapitulation only in Ephesians 1:10, and therefore this seems like an isolated topic. Furthermore, since the author does not explain it nor share his understanding of the verb, Ephesians 1:10 can have various interpretations, including creative ones. However, the author clarifies his perspective little by little, by explaining the steps in his argument. In the end the cosmic recapitulation will appear to be the reconciliation of the universe—already brought about in the Risen Christ—and cannot be separated from the reality and mission of the church and of the believers. We will see this further on.

For her part, Chiara returned to the idea of recapitulation, which has become traditional within the church, and shed light on it with *claritas* that comes from the charism of unity. Chiara expresses this reality by using the image of rays converging in the

center of the Sun.<sup>10</sup> Here is a very deep text in which she summarizes her mystical experience:

In showing me Paradise with all that is beyond this life and all that is created, the Lord was truly a teacher.

At first he made me experience the nothingness of all that is created, that is, its being non-being, in itself.

Having arrived within the Father, I felt him alone to be concrete (Being) and all that is contained in his Bosom.

Then, unfolding created reality to me with analogies that are inadequate (like that of the sun) but useful for an initial understanding, he filled each thing for me with concreteness. Indeed, to my mind he showed Heaven as the inside of the Sun. The projection of the Father within himself is the Word and all that in him is contained. And the created, instead, was the Sun's projection outside itself.

At the end of all these illuminations, I felt the projection of the Father, which is Love's projection outside itself and Love's projection within itself, to have equal concreteness.

And this because the Father sent his Son to earth to be intermingled with created things, to sum up and divinize them. Jesus, the Mediator, was the cause of the marriage between the Uncreated and the created, of the unity between the created and the Uncreated, equal to the unity between the Word and the Father.

---

9. This topic was already touched on in the first part of this study: see Gérard Rossé (2016) “Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 5, no. 1. Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/claritas/vol5/iss1/4>.

---

10. Gérard Rossé (2016) “Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise'49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians: Divine Adoption and Divine Design,” *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 5, no. 1. Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/claritas/vol5/iss1/5>.

We could say that Chiara, in the span of her mystical experience, goes through God's design on creation from the extreme distance from God (the "nothingness" of creation) up to the "marriage between the Uncreated and the created," thanks to the incarnate Son who "synthesizes." We can also look at another text, a type of allegory that sheds light on the phrase, "what is created . . . was the Sun's projection outside of itself":

When upon the walls I see the water of a lake projected by the sun, and see the play of the water upon the walls trembling in accord with the quivering of the true water, I think of creation.

The Father is the true sun. The Word is the true water. The reflected lake is what is created. What is created is nothingness clothed in the Word. It is the Word reflected. Therefore, what has "being" in the created is nothing but God. Except that, while the lake on the walls is false, in creation the Word is present and alive: "I am . . . the Life."

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

Everything begins from the sun, the sun who is reflected in the lake (the Word) but who sends, from the lake, his rays onto the walls, a wall on which the sun (Father) models the reality of creation on the Word, projecting in creation the various and multicolored richness contained within the Word (the image of trembling water). However, there is a difference between the image and reality. The image on the wall does not have a separate existence because there is no real lake on the wall, while in creation

the presence of the Word is real and He gives creation his own identity: "nothingness clothed in the Word."

Since always what is created is nothingness (a radical distinction from God) but clothed in the Word, therefore, it has the mark of a child and bears within itself its own future destiny in God. For Chiara, recapitulation is therefore the *parousia* of creation; its "divinization" (which is not fusion) is the glorious manifestation of the connection with God and the divine law that from eternity carries in itself: the "marriage" of the Uncreated with the created that entails a relationship of love between God and creation.

Chiara continues from the passage cited above:

And in this unity<sup>11</sup> each thing is in the Bosom of the Father and each thing is outside the Father and contains the Father. Indeed, as each thing is in the Son, in the Word, it is with the Word in the Bosom of the Father ("I in you") and embraces the Father ("You in me"): the prayer for unity, "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21) extended to what is created.

. . .

In such a way that in the end all was *God*: God in himself and God in the created. Two, but made one by the Mediator, Jesus. God therefore, in creating, did not do anything other than clothe nothingness with himself, giving himself in participation to nothingness. God is the One who is. All that is, is God—God: Creator, God: Creation.

---

11. That is, the "marriage" between the Uncreated and what is created.



In this passage, the “nothingness created” is perceived in its positive value: the potential to be open to the divine, space where God can enter, where the constant relationship between creation and God exists. On the other hand, if in the language of mystics God is said to be also creation, this does not mean that there is a fusion of divine and creation: the two realities are distinct and remain that way, in every aspect. However, the reality of *divine density* underneath everything comes to the fore: it is final—eschatological—reality already present at the moment of creation that the mystic takes in with one gaze.<sup>12</sup> If God is Being and, as such, expresses his relationship with creation (truth of the “continuing creation”), then God is the real truth of creation. Matter does not have true existence without God. The cosmic function of the Risen One is to bring this relationship to fulfillment.

Going back to Ephesians 1:10 (on the “recapitulation”), we need to keep in mind the value of the expression “in Christ,” which is emphasized. The chosen preposition “in,” which expresses the Hebrew *bē* in the Letter to the Ephesians, often means “in” and “through,” that is, of instrumental (mediation) and inclusion or participation meanings. Therefore, the phrase “recapitulating all things in Christ . . . in him” shows that Christ is not only the mediator of recapitulation, that is, in the act of recapitulating (dynamic aspect of his function), but also the end of the Father’s acting: Christ is also the perpetual place of the fulfilled recapitulation.

This truth is well illustrated in Chiara’s text “Each thing is in the Son,” which is the wisdom perspective (Word, mirror of

God’s creative project: see Wis 7:26; Heb 1:2f; in Chiara, “He is the Word in whom the Father sees all he made when he created”) and finds its natural eschatological conclusion. In other words, the world, though created *ad extra* and destined to fullness, never existed outside of Christ but has always been rooted in the depth of God, where the Father loves the Son and communicates everything to him.

### *Link between Creation and Fulfillment: in Christ*

This reflection leads us to another concept mentioned earlier that needs to be developed. If the universe is created “in Christ” and finds its fulfillment “in Christ,” then it has within itself from the beginning the filial mark, and recapitulation does nothing else but shed full light—even in a completely new fullness—on a law that has always been inscribed in nature. This is how Chiara illustrates this recapitulation: “I understood that from the Father those divergent rays went out when he created all things and those rays gave Order that is Life and Love and Truth.”

Creation has within itself the relationship with the Word. The varied richness of creation given by the diverging rays is as held within the One, in the Word from whom it comes. In other words, behind everything, behind multiplicity, there is the hidden presence of the One. This One present underneath everything ensures that creation is not a disorderly and chaotic multiplicity, an absurd juxtaposition of things. The One behind things creates harmony, relationships, beauty, and cohesion and gives meaning to the individual in relation to the whole. Each thing is as if sustained in its deepest meaning by an invisible reality that gives it true consistency and its place within the whole of creation. The Word behind things gives them meaning because it sets them in

---

12. It is always important to keep in mind the language of mystics, outside of which a syllogism like “God is the One who is. All that is is God” would seem to be a mistake.

a relationship of mutual love. One of Chiara's powerful mystical experiences shows this well:

I had the impression of seeing, perhaps through a special grace of God, the presence of God beneath things. So, if the pine trees were gilded by the sun, if the streams ran down in their glistening waterfalls, if the daisies and the other flowers and the sky were in celebration because of the summer, stronger yet was the vision of a sun that lay beneath what is created. I saw, in a certain way, I think, God who sustains, who upholds all things.

And God beneath things made it so that they were not as we see them; they were all linked among themselves by love, all, so to speak, in love with one another. So if the stream emptied into the lake, it was for love. If a pine tree rose up next to another, it was for love.

And the vision of God beneath things, which gave unity to what is created, was stronger than the things themselves; the unity of the whole was stronger than the distinction among the things.

The following text is a summary: "On earth all is relationship of love with all, each thing with each thing. It is necessary to be Love to find the golden thread that connects all beings." This is not a utopian vision but a mystical perception that sees, beyond the "laws of the jungle" that seem to dominate our world, a hidden reality that will be manifested in the Eschaton. In order for us to perceive the positive within the negative, to discover the golden thread behind a law of death that is prevalent in the current conditions of creation, an event is needed to change the direction of our

vision entirely and reveal and realize in history this total change of direction. The event is Jesus crucified and forsaken.

For now, let us keep this in mind: The Word, the One who sustains the multiplicity in creation, does not absorb, does not eliminate diversity but creates, as the law of creation, relationality among things. For one thing, recapitulation is possible because the law of the Word has been in creation since the beginning and because creation is not chaos but has inscribed within itself relationships among all things. If the Crucified One reveals the law of the Word in history and in the world, there has begun the journey toward unity as manifestation and realization of love among things.

Several of Chiara's writings express this link between protology and eschatology. "At the end of times (everything) will turn again into the Word, though it had always been in the Word." I find a thought-provoking application of this link in Chiara's critique of the thought of the seventeenth-century theologian Olier, whose spiritual books were very popular before the Second Vatican Council.

Comparing the condition of Christians to that of Adam in his innocence, Olier writes that there is a great difference between the two. Adam sought God, served him and adored him in creatures; Christians instead are obliged to seek God through faith, to serve him and adore him drawn away into himself and in his holiness, separate from every creature, and that the grace of baptism lies in this.

If we were to think like this, we would say that Jesus, dying on the cross, did not re-establish the order broken by sin on earth. While I believe that everything has been done

by him in such a way that whoever takes advantage of his Redemption to the full, implementing the Gospel entirely (as it is implemented in our Unity, where other than the first rebirth with water there is also rebirth in the Spirit),<sup>13</sup> discovers the pristine order of things, in the fullness of joy.

In reaction to a Christian spirituality focused on the individual that thinks God can be found in searching far from things (a dualistic risk of classic mystics stemming from Hellenistic philosophy), Chiara sets the Christian within the logic of redemption, where Christ “has re-established the order broken by sin.” Whoever lives the gospels becomes part of this direction, infuses love where there is none, and participates in the “recapitulation.” Recapitulation is brought about in history not by isolating oneself from the rest of the world but by living in a relationship of love with everyone and everything. Thus, one “discovers the pristine order of things in the fullness of joy.” Chiara’s thought is consistent with the core of Revelation: Redemption does not distance humanity from the world to allow humanity to reach God. On the contrary, redemption makes God enter fully into the world so that human beings can encounter God.

### *Intimate Relationship between Christ and the Church*

Through the resurrection, God set Christ above cosmic powers and gave him, as the Head, also to the church. This is a privileged relationship with the church, which is his Body. Let us keep in mind the unbreakable relationship between Christ and

---

13. Chiara explains, “With the expression ‘rebirth in the Spirit,’ I mean to refer to all that the charism works in us and in our life.”

the church, represented by the image Head-Body, that expresses a deep shared identity while preserving their distinction, as well as the vital role of the Head toward the entire Body. In the Letter to the Ephesians, the reader is constantly reminded of the relationship between the church and Christ with the phrase “in Christ,” which emphasizes the mediating function of the Risen Christ and the ultimate end/purpose of the Father’s actions. We read “in Christ” at least twelve times in the initial blessing (Eph 1:3–13): “In Christ” God chose us, we have adoption as children, redemption, universal recapitulation, inheritance, and so on.

In a non-Pauline way, but consistently with Colossians 2:12, the author states that “in Christ” we are already co-vivified, co-risen, and God has already made us co-seated in heaven where Christ lives (Eph 2:5–6). Since we are members of his Body, we already participate in His Easter, and we are where He is: in God. The author of the Letter to the Ephesians contemplates Christian life starting from its fulfillment.

When the author states that we are “created in Christ” (Eph 2:10) he has in mind (clearly, from the context) the eschatological function of the Lord: it is God who made “the new creation” uniting us to Christ as our mediator and ultimate end/purpose. “In Christ” we are close to one another (Eph 2:13) and have access to the Father (Eph 2:18). Therefore, humanity is called to live “in Christ.” Christ is the destiny of human beings, the place in which to dwell (that is, in a relationship that brings about being). In Christ, human beings are constituted as His Body and become Children who live in the presence of the Father.

The relationship with the Risen Jesus is described again with additional images: The image of the Spouse underscores the loving relationship. Christ is also the cornerstone of the building that

is the church: The whole building is kept together by this stone, which is Christ. Furthermore, this building is alive and *grows* toward the Risen Christ in a process of development that makes the church increasingly more similar to Christ (Eph 2:21; see 4:13, 15–16). It is the Risen Jesus who envelops the whole growth process from its beginning to the end. The growth of the church toward Christ is not primarily seen as a growth in time, a journey toward the future, but rather an upward movement toward the Head that has always been present in the church, which makes it possible to grow toward the church in each person’s daily life, as toward the One who is the true identity of the church itself (Eph 4:15).

One last concept: the *Pleroma*. The letter talks about Christ as the Head, given to the church “which is His Body, the Fullness (*pleroma*) of the one who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). Here, I translate a sentence that is ambiguous and can be rendered in multiple ways and therefore can yield many interpretations. The following are two of the possible interpretations: (1) the church, Body of Christ, is the *pleroma* (the fullness) of the One (Christ) who is filled (he himself) completely (with God); (2) the church, Body of Christ, is the *pleroma* of Him (Christ) who brings to fullness everything in every part (or: in all).

The Letter to the Colossians says that the fullness (*pleroma*) of God dwells in Christ (Col 1:19). The Letter to the Ephesians is inspired by Colossians but has a more ecclesial perspective: Now it is the church that is the fullness (*pleroma*) of Christ who brings everything to fullness. Christ fills the church with his presence. Therefore, the church is rich with the divine fullness of Christ who dwells in her. The Risen Jesus who received everything from the Father communicates his richness to the church. As a consequence, the church is introduced into the divine fullness that

Christ received from the Father. The church, in turn, becomes the place where Christ wants to irradiate his unifying force in creation: “The Letter to the Colossians designated Christ, who is filled with God and fills us with God; Ephesians continues along the same line and brings up the Church, fullness of Christ, filled with Him in order to fill the universe, while waiting that the same universe, filled by the divine presence, become the expression of glory.”<sup>14</sup>

The letter then underscores that for the church filled with his presence Christ is all. The relationship of the Risen Lord with the church never achieves a complete identification. Such “identification” and the terminology to express it should be carefully avoided. Christ, in his deep—I would say natural—relationship with the church remains always the Head, distinct from the Body, the Bridegroom, distinct from the Bride, the cornerstone. Christ always remains in a relationship of transcendence and unification.

In authentic Christian mystical language, though recognizing as obvious the distinction between Christ and the church, the emphasis is on the identification: It is the experience of the radical transformation in Christ, the experience of “no longer I but Christ in me” (Gal 2:20). In Chiara’s mystical writings, there are frequent expressions such as “I was that Jesus,” “Today we are Jesus,” “We are each truly destined to be another Jesus,” and so on. These are mystical expressions that emphasize the reality of union experienced as identity. However, they should not be understood as an experience of “fusion” or “de-personalization.” Furthermore, the originality of Chiara’s experience should always be kept in mind even if the usual mystical expressions are used. When we read in

---

14. Michel Bouttier, *L’Épître de Saint Paul aux Éphésiens* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1991), 293.

Chiara's writings "I am Jesus" or "my neighbor is Jesus" or "we are Jesus," we are not encountering someone who withdraws from the "world," goes up a mountain, and lives full union with God (Christ). The experience of "being Jesus" is essentially the result of "being church" and therefore of the charism of unity.

Whatever Chiara experiences in a mystical way personally is the unity as constitutive of the church, Body of Christ. "Being Jesus" that stems from it expresses the *full* presence of Christ, which characterizes his *Pleroma* in the "mutual nothingness" that brings about the church. Therefore, between two individuals who are made church, there is no temptation to fusion in this ecclesial vision whereby the neighbor becomes mediator of the Risen One. Therefore, Chiara can answer Paul's statement to the Galatians in which he wants to emphasize the Christian novelty compared to the Mosaic Law (Gal 2:20) by giving to it a markedly ecclesial interpretation: "It is no longer we who live; it is Christ, truly, who lives in us"

More than ever in the relationship of unity, the church reflects in the best way the Mystery dwelling in her, and it is its *Pleroma* (fullness). In mutual love, Christ, whose *Pleroma* is the church, becomes present within each individual. I will talk more later about the importance of love (as implementation of the cosmic "recapitulation" in history). For the time being, it is important to emphasize the deep relationship between Christ and the church in this comparison between the Letter to the Ephesians and Chiara's mystical writings.

### *Christ – Church – Cosmos*

We are now going to consider the relationship existing "in Christ" between the church and creation. As previously mentioned,

Ephesians presents Christ as the Head both of the cosmos and of the church, but only the latter is His Body, His *Pleroma*. The church is set in a mission that has universal breadth: Christ wants to use Her to bring about His sovereignty in the world. The church becomes mediator of Christ of which it is the *Pleroma*. Let us look at the phrase in Eph 1:22–23a: "The Father has put all things under his [Christ's] feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body." The common translation "and he has made him the *supreme* head"<sup>15</sup> is not faithful to the original text, which mentions the cosmic supremacy of Christ given to the church. God gave the church a Christ as Sovereign of the universe. As a consequence, there is a new relationship between the church and creation, thanks to the gift of Christ. He, present in the church and in the heart of each believer, is the deep connection between the church and creation.

To expand the Kingdom of Christ, the church should not establish a universal theocracy nor be concerned about extending the proclamation of the gospel to the farthest galaxies. Rather, the church should be open to the Christ present in her and grow in her love toward Him. For the "cosmic" Christ who dwells in the church and in the heart of the individual believers united to the Church, each act of love has cosmic repercussions and brings about concretely in history the universal recapitulation of Christ that has already taken place in the Risen One. Therefore, the cosmic function of the church is mediated by Christ who dwells in Her.

---

15. Rossé here refers more specifically to the Italian or French translation of the passage [translator's note].

This connection between church and creation, mediated by Christ, suggested by the Letter to the Ephesians is also an original aspect of Chiara's thought. Consider the following text:

We will be in the heart of the Bosom of God because we will be in that wound. But we will be also on the outermost surface of God (to explain what I mean) where the root is united, through a mediator who is Nothing, to its Tree.<sup>16</sup> Like this, we, beyond being the Infinitely Small, will also be the Infinitely Great.<sup>17</sup> We will be God through Jesus, who is among us, who is us.

The Paschal journey of Christ, by participation, becomes for the church both the journey into the bosom of the Father and a mission of universal recapitulation in the world. Chiara writes further: "Man . . . having in himself . . . the whole of the Word, he too will be a mirror of the Universe which is in the Word," mediator for humanity in the universe that He recapitulates. This cosmic-divine breadth mediated by Christ present in the believer is part of Chiara's mystical awareness:

At Holy Communion Jesus (mirror of the Mystical Body of Christ) entered into me and I, possessing all the Love of the

---

16. Chiara explains in a note, "We will also be Jesus Forsaken, who is always Jesus. Therefore, we also will be at the periphery, at the surface, where Jesus Forsaken, who is Nothing, is Mediator. Through him the tree, which is humanity and creation, is united to God."

17. During a session of the Abba School, Fr. Foresi commented, "Beyond being infinitely small, we are, through Christ, infinitely great. Through Jesus Forsaken beneath every particular there is the universal."

Communion of Saints and more (of all created creatures), said to the Father: "I love you." It was *sincere* love because in me was Love and it was Infinite.

The fullness of Christ, universal recapitulator, present in the church, is therefore communicated to the believer, who experiences unity. As daughter in the Son, Chiara addresses the Father with all the richness of the unifying love of Christ. Here is another passage:

I feel I live in me all the creatures of the world, all the Communion of Saints. Really: because my I is humanity with all the people that were, are, and will be. I feel and I live this reality: because I feel in my soul both the delight of Heaven and the anguish of humanity that is all a great Jesus Forsaken.

Jesus Forsaken, Nothingness, Mediator between God and human beings, is also, because he is Risen, Mediator between the self and the whole of humanity, which he recapitulates. Loving Jesus Forsaken in the heart means realizing in one's own self the eschatological unity between humanity and God, between anguish and fullness of joy. The same concept is found in the following passage:

Now Jesus makes clear to me that we too must be Wounded: to have in our heart a void, and in the void the whole of Heaven and the earth with all the Children of God and the entire Creation.

The identification with Christ (with the Paschal journey) makes us participate in his reconciliatory mission and at the same time makes us “co-rise and co-seat in Heaven,” as it is said in the Letter to the Ephesians. In this regard, Chiara says the following: “to have emptiness in the heart and in emptiness the whole of *heaven*.” For Chiara, Jesus is always “that Jesus who is the One in whom created and Uncreated converge and are consumed in God.” Given Christ who dwells in the heart of the believer who lives out love, each act has an eschatological value: recapitulation of the cosmos and access to the Father.

*Gérard Rossé is professor of biblical studies at Sophia University Institute. He studied biblical theology at the Pontifical Lateran University and the Pontifical Biblical Institute. He has published six books and five biblical commentaries in Italian. Rossé is author of The Spirituality of Communion: A New Approach to the Johannine Writings (1998). His most recent book is Maledetto l'appeso al legno (2006).*