Parts and Participation in the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich from the Perspective of Mereology

by Judith Povilus

The article considers Chiara Lubich's mystical experience of "participation," as recorded in the Paradise '49 *writings, from the viewpoint of the discipline of mereology (a formal study of parts). It illustrates how the pattern of participation described by Chiara can find rational support (in the sense of not being conceptually impossible) in a non standard version of mereology.*

Keywords: Part - Participation - Mereology - Creation - Divine life

> How could we conceive of a creation that is less than the Creator? Something less than the Infinite? A lesser infinity? No. They are equal and distinct. (Chiara Lubich)

Introduction

Chiara Lubich's mystical experience, as recorded in the writings *Paradise '49* is – as she herself describes – a "participation" in realities transcending time and space: in the reality of the Risen Lord, in his death and Resurrection, in the reality of Mary from an eschatological viewpoint as–being assumed into heaven in a glorified state – encompassing all of humanity (LG 68), and in the divine reality of the Trinity, the one and triune God. Moreover hers is not only a personal experience of sharing in the Godhead – including a communal dimension experienced with a close group – but also a comprehension that all humanity, indeed all creation, is called to participate in divine life in a full and mysterious way.

We will consider some examples of this in Chiara's writings in the second part of our study.

For now it will suffice, by way of example, to include one phrase, which we will come back to later, setting it in fuller context:

> Participating in the divine Life, therefore, does not mean our receiving a part, but our having the whole of it in us, we who are particulars.[1]

In what sense is Chiara speaking here of "part" and "whole"? Immediately some thought provoking questions come to the fore: Is the whole always greater than the part? Can a whole be considered as part of itself? And if A is a part of B and B is a part of A, does it necessarily follow that A is B (identity)?

As the few lines cited above suggest, the profound significance of "participation" in Chiara's experience and comprehension goes beyond the everyday common sense meaning of "taking part in" and of "part and whole" in which our physical concepts of time and space are ingrained. What is implied is rather a genuine sameness in entities that at the same time remain distinct, an overlapping that determines their "oneness," and yet does not do away with "otherness."

In this brief study I would like to consider this singular mode of participation not from a theological nor philosophical viewpoint, in the classical sense of philosophy. To do so one would need to delve into an ocean of speculative research, begin-

1 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, 19 April 1950.

ning from the Greek classics on through Thomas Aquinas and beyond[2] but a similar approach is obviously beyond my competency and the scope of this paper.

Rather in view of my academic formation which includes systematic theology but also the fields of logic and the foundations of math, I would like to avail of a different kind of insight, focusing on this topic from the not-so-well-known field of research that goes by the name of "mereology" (which is, in turn, a portion of the broader field of formal ontology). I am convinced this field of study can offer a valid contribution not in attempting to probe the mystery, which, as we said, is of a profound theological/philosophical nature, and which we leave to the respective experts, but more simply in illustrating and confirming the conceptual possibility of there being a part that "contains" the whole. What comes to mind immediately by way of analogy are the pieces of a fractal design or the fragments of a hologram. Furthermore, utilizing the example that Chiara Lubich offers on the level of faith, one can think of a portion of the Eucharist containing the whole reality of Christ. But our exploration here is on a more general level, prescinding from faith. In order to reach our goal we will need to define precisely what we mean by the relation of "part" in the most basic sense. And it is here that mereology can come to our aid.

1. Mereology

Research in logic and the foundations of mathematics at the service of mankind's journey towards "the fullness of truth" (Jn 16;13)

Before entering the perspective of mereology (which, incidentally, is derived from the Greek term *meros*= part, hence a theory of parts), I would like to spend a few words to sustain the correctness and feasibility, and even more, the opportuneness of proposing a similar input to contribute to research on Chiara Lubich's mystical experience as recorded in the *Paradise '49* texts. At this point some readers might object: "What? Logic and mathematics offering a contribution to writings of a mystical nature?" In reality, going down to their foundations, logic and mathematics boil down to a study of relations, structures and patterns of entities or thought, in the most general sense, disjoint from any particular physical or temporal conditioning. So like ontology, which studies "being," formal ontology, in which

2 - For an excellent synthesis, see C. Lamana, *La nozione di partecipazione in Tommaso d'Aquino*. The author illustrates how Aquinas refined, rectified and reordered the notions of Plato, Aristotle, Dionisius the Areopagite and Boethius, harmonizing seemingly contrasting views. http://www.filosofico.net/tommadcquinopartecipazionetsdf7.htm#:~:text=Nel%20De%20hebdomadibus%20Tommaso%20definisce,che%20partecipa%E2%80%9D%5B27

mereology is embedded, studies the essential forms or patterns of relationality underlying or constituting "that which is." Moreover, not being tied down to physical realities, it – like mathematical musing – is well suited for fathoming beyond, as Nicholas of Cusa, early-Renaissance philosopher-mystic and mathematician, affirmed in his treatise *On learned ignorance*. We shall come back to Nicholas of Cusa briefly again later.

Coming closer to our times and to the argument at hand we find that acute thinkers often began from pondering the foundations of mathematics – in an effort to understand and express the most basic forms of interrelation – and ended up deriving philosophical conclusions. An eminent example is Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), trained as a mathematician, and known especially for his contribution to phenomenology. Less well-known is Husserl's claim to the founding of formal ontology.[3]

It is in the context of the formal ontology put forth in his *Logical Investigations* that Husserl enacted a thorough study of parts which was the philosophical forerunner of the modern discipline of mereology.[4]

The name and science of "mereology" is attributed instead to the Polish logician Stanislaw Leśniewski (1886-1939), who was contemporary with Husserl but independently worked out a systematic treatise on parts and wholes in seeking to offer a solution to the Russel paradox.[5]

In the present article, in presenting some texts by Chiara Lubich that focus on participation, I would like to explain how, beginning from the perspective of mereology, it may be possible to describe in a non-contradictory way the particular mode of participation that emerges from her mystical experience. In other words there can be a rational system which allows a description of an identity between part and whole while maintaining a non-identity of genealogy, where part and whole are identical yet distinct.

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3 - As Husserl himself affirms: «To the best of my knowledge, the idea of formal ontology made its first literary appearance in Volume 1 of my *Logical Investigations*, […] although not yet appearing under the name of "formal ontology" which was introduced by me only later.» E. Husserl, *Formale und transzendentale Logik. Versuch einer Kritik der logischen Vernunft* in «Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung» (Halle), 10, 1929.

4 - See E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations* (*Logische Untersuchungen*, 1900), "Third investigation, On the theory of wholes and parts," in particular I and II.

5 - See S. Leśniewski, *Collected works*. Volume I, ed. by S.J. Surma, J.T. Srzednicki, D.I. Barrnett and V.F. Rickey, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 1991.

To a reader unaccustomed to abstract thought the details of mereology may appear arduous and difficult to apprehend. In order to explain our proposal, we will need to draw from some advanced studies at the frontier of mereological reasoning, the roots of which extend into the composite terrain of logic and ontology. We will try to make ourselves understood in non-technical terms without compromising the accuracy of the contents. In any case, in a journal like *Sophia* expressly dedicated to "Research on the foundations and correlations of various fields of knowledge," the effort exerted in a cross-disciplinary exercise of this kind can be considered a necessary "part of the game," and at the same time a harbinger of new horizons.

Part, participation, and the study of parts

In ordinary speech the words "part" and its derivative "participate" or "partake" encompass a myriad of nuances of meaning.[6] The skin is part of an apple. This article is a part of the Sophia Review. Every clod of European soil, as the famous poem of John Dunn reminds us, is "part of the main."[7] You and I are part of humanity. However, when Chiara notes that participating in divine life does not mean receiving a part, but having the whole in a "particular," she expresses a distinctive meaning of part and whole that mereological research at its start did not have in mind.

Husserl in his ground-breaking treatise *Logical Investigations* began by specifying in general terms the underlying nuances of difference in various part-to-part and part-to-whole relations: independent parts and dependent parts; parts that penetrate one another and parts that are mutually exclusive; coordinated parts of a whole, etc.

In chapter 24 on "The pure formal types of wholes and parts" he ends by confessing that he has given only some initial indications, since:

> a complete law-determined survey of the a priori possibilities of complexity in the form of wholes and parts, and an exact knowledge of the relations possible in this sphere […] would need to define all concepts with mathematical exactness and to deduce all theorems by formal arguments.[8]

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6 - Etymologically "part" derives from latin "partire" = "divide, share" and "participate" from part + "capere" = "take."

7 - J. Dunn, *No Man Is an island*, in *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Meditation XVII, 1623.

8 - E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, Third investigation, II,24. Betraying his formation in the exact sciences he adds «the progress from vaguely formed to mathematically exact concepts and theories is, here

Leśniewski's research was a pivotal step in the direction of a precise, logic-based treatment of the topic. Although aware of Husserl's efforts from the time of his doctoral thesis, he carried it forward on his own in an original way. His work, that now goes by the name of classical extensional mereology, is today considered foundational for the broad and growing field of mereological research.[9]

Our ultimate goal in the present study is to draw on a non-standard version of mereology,[10] which as we will see is best suited for giving logical soundness to Chiara's mystical experience of participating in divine realities. But beforehand, we shall need to start from the basics, presenting the most simple underlying axioms of classical mereology as derived from Leśniewski's thought. These can be expressed in the following three axioms:

P 1 Every entity is a part of itself. (Reflexivity)

P 2 If A is a part of B and B is a part of C, then A is a part of C (Transitivity)

P 3 If A is a part of B and B is a part of A, then A and B are identical (Antisymmetry)

First some general remarks. P1, already expressed by Husserl,[11] reminds us that in speaking of "part" in mereological terms we are not limiting ourselves to the commonly used sense of the word, where in taking any part away from a whole, there must be something left over. (This specific kind of "part" is called "proper part," but the meaning of "part" in classical mereology is more general and includes the whole).

Since these three axioms are of a most general nature, in order to describe the specific variations of content in speaking of "part," also required to respond to questions of common sense, other axioms or "principles" have been added one by one, to form various mereological theories. We need not go into the details here.

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as everywhere, the precondition for full insight into *a priori* connections and an inescapable demand of science.»

9 - For a clear and thorough investigation of mereology see P.Simons, *Parts. A Study in Ontology*, Oxford University Press, New York 2003[2]. Of particular note his remarks on "Analogies between Ontology and Mereology," pp. 148-153.

10 - Non-standard here is equivalent to "Non-classical" (i.e. not limited to the three classical axioms listed below). Our proposal is also "non-extensional," following the hypothesis of Simons (cit., p. 117), however the details that involve abandoning Supplementation Principles for Proper Parts are unnecessary here and beyond the scope of this paper.

11 - Husserl, cit,I, 2, «An object in itself, considered in abstraction from all contexts to which it is tied, is likewise a part.»

Going back to the assertion of Chiara Lubich quoted above («Participating in the divine Life […] does not mean our receiving a part, but our having the whole of it in us, we who are particulars») we can ask if the three general axioms of classical mereology can be applied in this case and if they suffice. It would seem that P3 cannot hold, for Chiara states that the whole of God is in us, and we are wholly in God. But we are not God! There seems to be an incongruency between the most general theory of classical mereology and the experience Chiara describes!

What if… ? Non-standard mereology. Going beyond common sense.

If we eliminate axiom P 3, what would we have? A more general theory, to be sure, with weaker conditioning, which also holds for the kind of part/whole relationship we know in our everyday world, without describing it fully. But can this weaker conditioning tell us something useful, something more, opening up heretofore unthought-of horizons?

Other examples of this kind of process, where a loosening of restrictions (axioms) that precede thought led to surprising conclusions, are not lacking. Perhaps the most well-known is the case of non-Euclidean geometry. By eliminating just one of the theretofore unquestionable axioms on which Euclid based his entire system, the so-called axiom of parallels (translated into simple terms, two parallel lines never meet), a whole new world opened up before the eyes of those who first discovered this logical possibility and to all the world thereafter.[12] In a wider, more general theory of geometry, of which Euclidean geometry is merely a portion, parallel lines can indeed meet!

So in our case, we could ask if there have been studies of mereology in which P3 is no longer considered a basic axiom. The answer is yes, more and more in recent years. Cotnoir, in presenting various versions of non-standard mereology, remarks that after years of mereological research, «there is no clear consensus on what constitutes a minimal concept of the parthood relation.»[13] Moreover «Recent discussion in the literature on mereology have consistently attempted to push the boundaries of the kinds of metaphysical structures we might have previously thought possible.»[14]

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12 - Beyond this purely intellectual finding, the second amazing discovery that came years later, with Einstein's theory of relativity, was that this new "extended" geometry was best suited to describe the real world in its cosmic dimensions. Thus what is involved is not just a thought game.

13 - A.J. Cotnoir, *Strange Parts: the Metaphysics of Non-classical Mereologies*, in «Philosophy Compass» 8/9 (2013), *p.* 834.

14 - Ibid., p. 842.

Again, we will not enter into the details, which do not serve our purpose here. We can only mention that one application in natural science, published in very formal terms, involves entangled quantum states.[15] For our present intent it suffices to grasp that a parthood relation in which two entities are mutually inclusive yet not identical is not inconceivable, is not contradictory to the tenets of rationality. This simple fact is the one particular contribution to the mystical insights of "participation" in Chiara Lubich that we wish to glean from mereology.

2. Participation in divine life in the experience and writings of Chiara Lubich

Introductory considerations

Having laid our mereological foundation, we are ready to introduce and briefly comment on a few relevant passages from the written descriptions of the mystical experience of Chiara Lubich, to whom this special issue of *Sophia* journal is dedicated.

To begin it is well to note that Chiara's entire mystical journey, as recorded in *Paradise '49*, can be considered an experience of "participation," a partaking in a transcendent reality, in a mysterious way. The same could be said of the experiences of other mystics. Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross immediately come to mind, but the list goes on and on. What is new perhaps in Chiara is the clear importance of the inner dynamic of the Trinity as the hermeneutic key. It is the reality expressed by Jesus in his words to Philip, as recorded in the Gospel of John: «How can you say, 'Show us the Father?' … He who has seen Me has seen the Father. Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?» (*Jn* 14:9-10). This mutual indwelling of the Father and Son is also given as a model of the indwelling of the Son in his disciples: «I am in my Father and you in me and I in you» (*Jn* 14:20).[16]

In Chiara this pattern of indwelling is clear from the start. Without losing her personal identity, she finds herself "identified" with Christ,[17] and this identification extends to the little group forged into one, one Soul, that enters with her into the

15 - See L. Obojska, *The Parthood of Indiscernibles: Foundations of Quantum Physics*, in Axiomathes» 29 (2019), pp. 427-439.

16 - See the entire text of *Jn* 17, in *particular Jn* 17:10,21,23.

17 - «Jesus who was in the tabernacle was also here in me, was me too, was me, identified with him.» Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, in V. Araujo et al, *Il Patto del '49 nell'esperienza di Chiara Lubich*, Città Nuova, Roma 2012, p. 18.

Bosom of the Father. It is of course none other than a clear perception of the eschatological reality cited by Paul in his letter to the Galations (2:20). Consider the pregnant words of Chiara describing the initial entrance into the Bosom of the Father: «Then our soul is the soul of Jesus. It is no longer we who live; it is Christ, truly, who lives in us."[18] Note Chiara's underlining to emphasize the realism.

This "entering into the Father" of Chiara and the initial group that is one Soul with her, is only the beginning of an experience that continues and progresses to ever-new heights and depths. In particular, in this article, we will present some aspects of the comprehension of the "participation" of all creation in the reality of the Godhead, in and through Christ in his saving act.

But before going on, two comments are to be made. The first brief remark is a sort of "normalization" of the notion of participation described above. From the perspective of faith, "participation" in divine life is an immediate consequence of Baptism, of our being grafted into Christ. This reality is further developed in the doctrine of the Mystical Body. What is new is an acute awareness of the realism of this doctrine.

The second comment brings us back to our presentation of mereology. What is the connection here, one might ask? Let us recall that the definition of the relation of "part" is not restricted to an "unfull portion" of the whole, but as defined in P1 also includes the concept of "whole." Chiara's descriptions of "participation" on a spiritual plane fit into this picture. The "part relation" described by P1 and P2 can be applied to the "being in" ("indwelling") relation mentioned above. Another comparable designation could be the concept: "contained in", i.e. the part relation of basic classical mereology could be substituted with "being contained in," although we tend to think of containment in a physical, space-determined sense whereas we are here on a spiritual level, beyond time and space. In any case, although P1 and P2 would seem to apply, Jesus's words to Philip quoted above point to the need for a new broader interpretation of P3.

Participation through Jesus forsaken

As announced, we now go back to the initial quotation cited in the first paragraph of our article, putting it into context. The writing is dated 19 April 1950, and so nine months after the initial "entry" into the Bosom of the Father. In this text Chiara is not describing a new experiential participative reality but rather reflecting

18 - Ibid, pp. 22-23.

on participative experiences of the preceding period. We will see that the "participation in divine life" that Chiara is speaking about is closely linked to Jesus forsaken, that is, to the reality of Christ's self-emptying on the cross (see *Phil* 2:7) to the point of his no longer experiencing his oneness with the Father, as revealed in his cry of abandonment (*Mt* 27:46). At the same time this cry marks the moment of Jesus's restoring the participation of the fullness of divine life to humanity.

> Never was Jesus so much a human being as when he was Jesus Forsaken. In fact, whereas previously he saw himself as the Human Being, now he is a human being.
>
> In fact, as he was – because God – the universal Human Being, having been detached from God, he remained a particular human being. But, not ceasing to be God, he divinized the particular.
>
> So he, being God, made divine the particular and shows how in a particular human being there can be contained the Universal.
>
> Participating in the divine Life, therefore, does not mean our receiving a part, but our having the whole of it in us, we who are particulars.
>
> Our Ideal: Jesus Forsaken gives us the possibility to be perfect like the Father even while being particular human beings. […]
>
> But this because at the base we put unity – "ante omnia" [before all]– and we distinguish ourselves from one another after we have been united, that is, we distinguish ourselves: Jesus, and hence God, distinct from God, God by participation.[19]

The text is rich and full of suggestive insights for theological/philosophical study. We can note at once that the notion of "participation" in Chiara's reflections here is not disjoint from the important metaphysical problem of the relation between individual and universal, on which volumes have been written. Leaving aside theological/ metaphysical considerations, what can be said from a purely mereological perspective is that in a non-standard version of mereology as discussed above, we need not preclude the prospect of being "distinct from God" and at the same time being "God by participation." Granted, the reality expressed is a mystery, beyond and yet not contrary to human reasoning.

We must also keep in mind that in the generative process leading to the relation of participation, there is One who is the Author. Our mereological reasoning heretofore has not provided for this specification, for an "ordering" of the relation, which is no longer evident when we omit P3, but we will come back to this later.

19 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49,* 19 Aprile 1950.

Reciprocal co-penetration

The following text which ends on the theme of participation brings us closer to the idea of mutual co-penetration that our non-classical version of mereology, eliminating P3, permits.

> God is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves, because no spirit will ever reach the unity of the Pure Spirit of God.
>
> And yet we are more intimate to God than God is to himself.[…]
>
> We are, in God, more intimate than God to himself because each of us is Word of God, a Word of God and, as a Word exists in the Word, likewise we are so much in God as to be God's intimate self. […]
>
> But in each Word is the whole of the Word just as in the Word is each Word.
>
> Therefore human beings are intimate to God as God is to himself. They are God if child of God. They are God through participation and distinct from God if living the Life that Jesus brought.[20]

There is a double affirmation in this text that warrants consideration: two assertions that would seem antithetical. The first: «God is more intimate to us that we are to ourselves» echoes the well-known expression of Augustine, «He is more intimate than my most intimate part, higher than my highest part.»[21] The second – its converse – is new and surprising: «We are, in God, more intimate than God to himself.» The logical conclusion ("A is contained in B and B is contained in A") would be: "A is the same as B" (we are God!). It is a conclusion which Chiara in effect reaches, however not in the classical sense of identity but rather in the mode of participative identity, as she explains in the final phrase: «human beings are intimate to God as God is to himself. They are God if child of God. They are God through participation.»

Without entering into the theological discourse of each person being a Word in the Word, we can remark that the pattern here of "the whole in every part," is recurrent in Chiara and that it can find logical validation in the perspective of a mereology in which we omit the principle of anti-symmetry (P3).

Participation of all created reality in the divine

There is another important and recurring theme in Chiara's mystical writings that merits attention in our reflection on the topic of participation.

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20 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49,* 26 October 1949.

21 - *Confessions*, 3.6.11. See also Bonaventura: "This light (of the Word) is inaccessible and nonetheless close to the soul, even more intimate than the soul is to itself" (*Hex* 12,11).

It is the fact that participation of human individuals and all humanity in God's reality through and in Jesus forsaken extends to the participation of the entire cosmos, of all creation. Jesus Forsaken in emptying himself of his divinity, Chiara says, makes himself Non-Being to share His Being with Creation. He is «God who reduces himself to Creation in order to reduce the Creation to God.»[22]

Chiara also uses the analogy of a marriage between that which is created and the Uncreated, a union accomplished by Jesus in his Passion and Resurrection. Through this "wedding," creation takes on as it were the same "value" as the Creator.

> [God] wed the creation he himself had created making himself one with it: One, Unity inseparable. And so creation says: "The Creator is greater than I." But it is a "greater" not of value but of hierarchy, of genealogy(!)[….] How could we conceive of a creation that is less than the Creator? Something less than the Infinite? A lesser infinity? No. They are equal and distinct.[23]

In these few lines there would be abundant matter for reflection from a theological/ philosophical stance,[24] but we will limit ourselves to a few considerations from a mereological point of view. The key phrases from this perspective are: 1) «It is a "greater" not of value but of hierarchy, of genealogy(!)» in reference to the relation between Increated and created reality, and 2) (lines that also appear in the lead-in quote of our article) «How could we conceive of a creation that is less than the Creator? Something less than the Infinite?»

The concepts of "greater" and "less" indicate an order, an ordering. In the classical system of mereology it is axiom P3 that imposes a form of what mathematicians call "partial ordering." By deleting P3 we have gained the possibility of conceiving two entities being of the same infinite value, equal and yet distinct, but we have "lost" order.[25] To describe more precisely the relation between creation and Creator, precluding any form of pantheism, we need to ensure an order of geneology or contingency. I suggest it could be useful for our purposes to add an "ordering principle", borrowing from Husserl's detailed study of ontological dependence, or

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22 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, 26 September 1949.

23 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49*, 26 October 1949.

24 - See. P. Coda, *Dio e la creazione*, in «Nuova Umanità» (1998/1), pp.67-88 e id. *Creazione in Cristo e nuova creazione nella mistica di Chiara Lubich*, in «Nuova Umanità» (2010/6), pp. 659-672

25 - To be precise, we are left with what is only a "semi-order" (reflexive and transitive), See Simons, cit., p. 117. Obojska (cit., p. 6) shows that beginning from a particular definition of proper part, an ordering can be obtained.

"foundation" that is closely connected to the study of parts. This is by no means a trivial task and we leave it as a topic for further investigation.[26]

As an aside, we can remark that similar notions regarding contingency and created infinity are developed in Nicholas of Cusa, cited earlier. Pondering the mystery of the participation of creation in the Creator he asks: «how it is that the one, infinite Form is participated in different ways by different created things?» In each there is, as it were, «a reflection that is contingently different.» Surprisingly similar to Chiara's words his expression: «every created thing is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god».[27]

From mereology to mariology

What comes across clearly in Chiara Lubich's insights regarding creation is that in the person of Mary all of creation in Christ is returning to God. Indeed it has already returned. As a final focus, I present two original passages that indicate creation as being participative in God also in relation to Mary, in her eschatological actuality. Assumed into heaven, Mary is the synthesis of all creation at its highest beauty, when it presents itself as a bride to its Creator.[28]

> The whole Creation returns, through Mary, into God. Mary is the entire Creation purified, redeemed. […] In her is the entire Trinity with the Creation the Trinity contains. Mary contains herself in herself by means of the Trinity, as in those mirrors that, facing one another, project images of each other infinitely and are re-contained in each other through the returning reflection.[29]

Here the relation of "being contained in" comes to the fore, a relation which as we saw earlier fits into the general system of axioms governing the relation of part and whole described by mereology. One can note a double sense of "mutual containment". Chiara sees Mary: (1) as contained in the Trinity and containing the Trinity in herself (as *Theotokos*); and (2) as contained in creation (she is a creature) and

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26 - A thorough analysis of ontological dependence in relation to mereology can be found in Simons, cit., pp. 290-323. The subject is complex and many sided. What needs to be clarified here is an expression of the precise "ordering principle" applicable in our case.

27 - *De docta ignorantia* , II/2, trad. The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota 1990^{2},pp. 63-64.

28 - See *Rev* 22:17. The description of the Bride in Chiara extends to all creation. See C. Lubich*, Mary, Flower of Humanity*, ed. B. Leahy and J. Povilus, New City Press, London 2017, p. 53.

29 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49,* 8 September 1949.

containing all creation in herself (the axiom of transitivity P2 is at play here).[30] Creation is contained in the Trinity, which is contained in Mary, who in turn is contained in the Trinity. We leave to theologians a study of the foundations and implications of this affirmation and to philosophy and formal ontology the profound theme of self-reference indicated by the infinitely reflecting mirrors. What mereology can say in this case has to do with conceptional possibility, as we saw before.

In the second passage, with which we conclude our paper, the realism of the participation of creation in Mary – creation as a whole and in its every detail – transpires in a poetic outburst:

> Everything that is, is Mary! It is Mary by participation.
> Mary is the Flower. The Flower is Mary.
> Mary is the Sky. The Sky is Mary.
> Mary is the Moon. The Moon is Mary. Mary is the Star. The stars are Mary.[31]

The participation represented is an eschatological vision of the "not yet" already in act through Mary's glorified body present in the Bosom of the Trinity. Again, we affirm that the conceptual possibility falls in line with the non-standard version of mereology referred to above.

Conclusion: what mereology can and cannot say

We have approached the mystery of the participation of humanity and all creation in divine reality through writings of Chiara Lubich that record profound mystical experiences. We have also attempted to view that experience through the lens of a particular realm of human reasoning called mereology, mindful that logical reasoning can lead us to the threshold of mystery but not beyond.

What we have seen is that mereology can open a window onto the conceivability of some of the deepest forms of relationality such as "participation" in the specific sense that emerges in Chiara's writings. Granted, it can only tell us something very general, prescinding from transcendental values or theological questions. It can tell us that the pattern of participation in the mystical experience of Chiara Lubich can find rational support (in the sense of not being conceptually impossible) in a non classical, non extensional study of parts. It cannot tell us anything about "how" or "why" nor clarify the nexus of truths. That is the task of other fields of research.

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30 - If Creation is contained in the Trinity and the Trinity is contained in Mary then Creation is contained in Mary. The same transitive principle is also evident, as seen above, in the relation of being "in Christ" who is in the Father.

31 - Chiara Lubich, *Paradise '49,* 8 September 1949.

So while holding to the limits of a particular discipline, at the same time we acknowledge the specific value it brings to interdisciplinary research, and interdisciplinary research is especially important in approaching, with due humility and respect, immense mysteries such as those described above.

According to the renowned Italian mathematician Ennio De Giorgi, recipient of the prestigious Wolf Award in 1990:

> There are probably many analogies that have not yet been deeply considered between the foundations of mathematics and the foundations of metaphysics and natural theology. Reflecting on these analogies could serve in developing a metaphysics and a theology that, while mindful of the weaknesses of human reasoning, at the same time do not forget its greatness and strength, also bearing in mind that paradoxes can best be faced through theories of a positive nature.[32]

Our reflections on a form of non-standard mereology in connection with the deep mystical experience of Chiara Lubich to whom we dedicate this issue of *Sophia* journal, can be, we hope, a step in this direction.

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32 - E. De Giorgi in F. Bassani, A. Marino, C. Sbordone, eds., *Ennio De Giorgi. Anche la scienza ha bisogno di sognare,* Università di Pisa, Pisa 2001, 179. My translation.