RECENSIONE

Paradise: Reflections on Chiara Lubich's Mystical Journey, edited by Don Mitchell

New City Press, 2020.

Courtesy of the author, Donald Mitchell (Purdue University), we reproduce the Introduction to the recent volume, published in the United States for the centenary of Chiara Lubich's birth. Alongside a Foreword by Peter Casarella (Duke Divinity School) and a Preface by Piero Coda (Sophia University Institute), it explains the genesis and context of the various contributions that make up the volume. The Introduction thus provides an articulated and broad framework for the spiritual, theological and socio-cultural extent of the charism of unity.

Keywords: Charism of unity - Mysticism - Culture of unity - Abbà School - Dialogue

Introduction

When just a young woman in her twenties, Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement—also known in the Catholic Church as the Work of Mary—had been meeting with a group of young women in Trent as the leader of the local Franciscan Third Order. Then, during World War II, their city was heavily bombed. During the air raids she and her companions would go to the shelters carrying only a book containing the four gospels. In pauses between the bombings, they began to live what they found in the gospels by serving the wounded, the poor, and the displaced. Others joined them in what came to be a new way of life based on a charism Chiara was receiving, a way that became the spiritual life of the Focolare. After the war, living together in a simple apartment, they continued their work. During the summer of 1949 their bishop recommended that they go to the Dolomites to rest for few months. During that time in her early life, Chiara experienced a mystical period that later came to be called "Paradise '49." Throughout that summer and afterward until 1951, she wrote about her mystical experiences in her journal.

In 1990, the German bishop Klaus Hemmerle, a well-known theologian, worked with Chiara to establish the Abba School, which until her death in 2008 met with Chiara to study the Paradise '49 texts. The name for this group comes from the word Chiara prayed in 1949 that began her mystical experiences. Eventually, as the members realized that the mystical experiences of Paradise '49 had implications for many fields other than spirituality, the Abba School grew to include twenty-four scholars from a range of disciplines: theology, philosophy, the social sciences, economics, mathematics, psychology, and the arts. The Abba School has published its studies in books and in the Italian-language journal, *Nuova Umanità* (http://www.rivistanuovaumanita.it).

In November 2010, scholars from around the world met at the Focolare conference center on the grounds of the Papal Palace in Castel Gandolfo for the Abba School's international conference for academics. A group of us took this opportunity to discuss the possibility of founding an English-language journal for articles related to the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich. Scholars who research and publish in English, as well as the leaders of the Abba School itself, welcomed the idea. During 2011, a staff of editors and an editorial board was established to publish an open-access academic journal: *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture.* I was chosen to be editor and it was published at Purdue University, where I was a professor.

The first issue came out in 2012, and the final issue at Purdue University was published in 2019. The articles in this book come from those issues of *Claritas*. In 2020, the journal moved to Sophia University Institute, a Pontifical university located on the grounds of Loppinao, Italy, the Focolare's school of formation. The articles are organized into six sections.

The Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich: Paradise '49

The first section presents articles concerning the mystical experiences of Chiara Lubich. It contains a contextualizing article, two of Chiara Lubich's presentations of her experience of Paradise, and a biblical commentary of her experience. "Contextualizing Paradise '49" introduces readers to Chiara Lubich's talks about her mystical experience that began during the summer of 1949 and continued to 1951. The authors are Giuseppe Zanghì, Piero Coda, Judith Povilus, and myself. Zanghì, Coda, and Povilus are all members of the Abba School. The essay locates Lubich in the history of Christian spirituality. Then, by examining her letters, it explores the history of her spirituality from the founding of the Focolare in 1943 to the summer of 1949. Finally, it looks at the text of the 1961 talk in order to help clarify the meaning of Lubich's experiences.

"Paradise '49 (1961)" is a translation of Lubich's remarks about those mystical experiences that began during the summer of 1949. This talk was presented at Oberiberg, Switzerland, on the Feast of St. Paul, June 30, 1961. "Paradise '49 (1969)" was published for the first time recently in Italian. It is her second presentation about her experience, this time to members of the Focolare in Rome. She clarifies some of the statements she made in 1961.

In "Entry into the Paradise of '49 and Biblical Revelation," Gérard Rossé explores some of the beginning passages from Lubich's 1961 talk about Paradise '49. Rossé seeks to explain these passages in the light of biblical revelation, in particular Pauline and Johannine theology. He focuses on two aspects: The first concerns how living the Word of God led up to Chiara's experience. The second concentrates on what she wrote about the special circumstances in which the mystical experience began, particularly the "Pact" she made with Igino Giordani, a noted Catholic writer and politician. This section of the essay serves to introduce the second sets of essays, which focus on this Pact.

The Pact and Paradise '49

The second section includes Chiara Lubich's talk concerning her Pact with Igino Giordani in 1949, a Pact that opened the door to Paradise '49. In sections 19-38 of this document, Chiara tells of Giordani's arrival in the mountains near Trent and

how his request to take a vow of obedience to her led to making a pact of unity together when they would receive the Eucharist on the following day. This pact led to Chiara's first mystical experience of the Trinity, which she shared first with Giordani and then also with her other companions. Her companions joined Chiara and Giordani in the pact. This pact led them all into a new relationship of unity, the collective birth of what Chiara called the "Soul." The final sections (38-42) describe the very first moments of what they experienced collectively as the Soul when together they felt they were entering the life of the Trinity.

In "Going from the Pact to the Soul: Exploring a Metaphysical Journey," Anna Pelli explains how the Pact led to something new: the Soul. Chiara describes the Soul as "the bond between us," the "space" where the multiplication of the one and the unification of the many is actualized. This article explores the conceptual development of thought about this issue. Pelli looks at the One-many relationship emblematic of the cultural and spiritual history of the West. Tracing its development from the pre-Socratics then to Plato, Nicholas of Cusa, and Leibniz, Pelli arrives at Lubich's contribution based on Uni-Trinitarian Love, the intimate mystery of God.

Implications of Paradise '49 for Theology

In the third section, noted scholars address the theological implications of Paradise '49. It begins with two articles by Piero Coda. The first is entitled: "Chiara Lubich and the Theology of Jesus: The Trinity as Place, Method, and Object of Thinking." By outlining the variety of forms theology takes, Coda illustrates how the key to knowing God theologically is by participation in Jesus' knowledge of God. By exploring scripture and theological tradition, Coda argues that, for all its advances, the modern theological method must regain awareness of participating, through Christ, in God's self-knowledge. Coda also presents the charisms, the different gifts of the Spirit throughout history, with particular attention upon Chiara Lubich's charism of unity. He explains how this charism, via the experience of humans united in God, provides a participatory knowledge of God in which knowing and loving coincide. This participation has a variety of significant consequences. Coda then turns to the basis for this knowledge, namely, the forsakenness of Christ upon the cross, to show how the crucified intellect goes beyond its natural limitations to share in the intellect, the mind (*nous*), of Christ. Coda concludes by pointing out the implications of this way of knowing for theological practice and suggests possibilities for a fresh approach that respects contemporary needs.

In his second article, "A Charism in History as a View from the Center," Coda provides an "interpretative key" for understanding Chiara Lubich's charism. Like all

charisms, its light illuminates the revelation of the Word made flesh in ways that guide and enrich all humanity. Chiara's charism, Coda argues, provides a convergent guide that includes all cultures for the mutual enrichment of humankind. Since we live in a bewildered, wounded, and fluid world today, Chiara's charism, light coming from the darkness of World War II, has its center in the hidden wound on Christ's soul when he cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The author points out that this is not a center to be looked upon, but from which to observe the world in order to help all persons find themselves in mutual relatedness—each as gift for the others on the pattern of the Trinity.

Coda's third article is entitled "God and Creation: Trinity and Creation out of Nothing." Using the fundamental and specifically Christian theological stance that begins from *creatio ex nihilo*, the author shows how Chiara Lubich, on the basis of her charism of unity, develops an original understanding of the creation event in which God gives being to nonbeing, constantly creating historically and preserving in being what is created, and, at the same time, making what is created evolve. This understanding is based upon reading creation out of nothing in light of a radical understanding of divine love that, as a result of its own dynamic, is both One and Three. This vision of reality implicitly contains a Trinitarian metaphysics that reinterprets the *vestigia trinitatis* in creation and gives a fresh understanding of creation's vocation to share in the divine life.

Coda's fourth and final article, "Creation in Christ and the New Creation in the Mysticism of Chiara Lubich," expands upon the meaning of "creation out of nothing" from the point of view of a Trinitarian ontology of love. He focuses more precisely upon creation in Christ, taking a closer look at the "new creation" in Christ crucified and risen and at our participation in it.

The next article in this section, by Thomas Norris, is "Creation in Christ and the New Creation in the Mysticism of Chiara Lubich." Norris points out that charisms lie at the root of great spiritualities, and great spiritualities not only provide ways of living the gospel in harmony with the tradition of the church but also inspire and renew cultures. Chiara Lubich and her companions made many discoveries under the bombs that pulverized Trent between 1943 and 1945: God-Love, the pearl of the gospels in the new commandment, and the reality of Jesus' presence among those united in his name. This article reflects on the insights that those discoveries provide for a Trinitarian ontology centered upon relationship.

The fifth article in this section is David L. Schindler's "The 'Yes' Under Every 'No.'" Based upon the charism of Chiara Lubich, this article proposes that in all those places and ways in which the world, at least on its surface, appears to be saying "no," we must penetrate to the "yes" that is straining to come out into being.

In the last article in this section, "The Virgin Mary, Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption: From the Church Fathers to Chiara Lubich," Brian K. Reynolds discusses a series of texts in "Paradise '49" regarding the Virgin Mary. After discussing Mary as *Theotokos* and the *Desolata,* he considers Lubich's mystical vision of Mary in relation to the Trinity, humanity, and creation. He shows how Lubich partakes entirely in the tradition of the Church Fathers, then argues that Lubich's insights add something new, particularly with regard to understanding the relationship between Jesus's cry of forsakenness on the cross and Mary's desolation as she participates in the agony of her Son and assents to the loss of her divine motherhood. Reynolds argues that Lubich's new understanding of these events has implications for a variety of doctrinal matters concerning Mary. But more important than this, he claims that Lubich shows how in her desolation Mary most fully mirrors the *kenosis* at the heart of the perichoretic relations of the Trinity, providing a model of how we may live Trinitarian love on earth in the renewal and transformation of creation.

Implication of Paradise '49 for Biblical Studies

The next section contains a four-part series of articles on the significance of Chiara's mystical experience for biblical studies. In this series, Gérard Rossé, a biblical scholar and member of the Abba School, presents similarities between Paradise '49 and the Letter to the Ephesians, with particular focus on the themes of God, Christ, the Word, ecclesiology, faith, and ethics. The first article, "Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians." begins with the proposition that genuine Christian mysticism and the thought it produces is never separated from faith. Rather, it produces a faith lived with greater clarity and intensity. This forms the basis for comparing the Letter to the Ephesians with some of Lubich's notes on her contemplative experience in 1949. Her mystical experience, Rossé emphasizes, was born from an experience of communion, of church. In a personal way, Chiara lived the reality of church in its profound identity with the Body of Christ. This reality can be described as participation in the Trinitarian life of God by being inserted into the Son's relationship with the Father. This study is particularly significant given that the principal concern of the Letter to the Ephesians is the identity of the church and its vocation to unity.

Rossé's second article, "Revising Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians: Divine Adoption and Divine Design," explores the initial blessing of divine adoption as children of God in Christ as expressed in Ephesians and in Chiara's Trinitarian experience of adoption in the design of God. Rossé then discusses how the divine design is fulfilled according to a Trinitarian dynamic in both Ephesians and Chiara's experience. Finally, he looks more deeply into the

source of this design, namely, the glory of God from which everything radiates and to which everything converges as it is expressed in Ephesians and in Chiara's Trinitarian-ecclesial-cosmic vision of the light and splendor of Divine Love. Rossé concludes that in this glory or splendor within the heart of the Trinity itself divine adoption is fulfilled.

In the third article of the series, "Revising Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians: The Holy Spirit, the Son of God, and the Cosmos," Rossé focuses on the Holy Spirit, the Risen 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, bringing creation to its eschatological recapitulation, a "marriage of the Uncreated and the created." The Risen Christ is presented in terms of his upward movement to the church's fulfilment (*pleroma*) in God, bringing humankind and all creation into its fullness of life.

The fourth and final article is "Revisiting Chiara Lubich's Paradise '49 in Light of the Letter to the Ephesians: Jesus Forsaken, the Church, and Agape-Love." Rossé explores these three themes. First is the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross for the church, humanity, history, and the cosmos. He then turns to the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich about Jesus Forsaken's role in the life of the Christian, the church, and the destiny of humanity and creation. Second, Rossé reflects on the understanding, found in Ephesians, of church as the Body of Christ brought about by the cross, by which new human persons are transformed and fulfilled in Christ. He explores Chiara Lubich's collective experience of being a cell of the church, and of living both Mary and Jesus to further the mission of Christ in the church and the world. Finally, Rossé explores the role of love— *agape*—both in Ephesians and in Chiara Lubich's spirituality of unity.

Implications of Paradise '49 for Humanity and the Church

The fifth section explores the implications of Chiara Lubich's experience of the Trinity for humanity and the church. In the first article, "Towards an Understanding of the Human Person According to the Mystical Experience of Chiara Lubich in the Paradise of '49," Callan Slipper maintains that the category of the person is a pillar of Chiara Lubich's experience and thought. It is fundamental to the philosophical and theological anthropology at the basis of the culture that is in the process of developing from her inspiration. To understand this category, however, it is necessary to see the person in the context of the whole architecture of her thinking. Looking at Lubich's experience of Paradise of '49, Slipper outlines this architecture in four sections. He begins with an overview of created reality in relation to uncre-

ated reality, showing how all things are the creaturely expression of Trinitarian Love. Then he looks at the specific characteristic of humanity that recapitulates creation and lives in a personal manner. Next, he demonstrates how this specific characteristic is focused in Mary the Theotokos, the perfect example of a human person. This leads, finally, to presenting how the individual person is fulfilled when human persons together partake of the presence of Jesus among them.

The second article, also by Callan Slipper, is entitled "Towards a New Kind of Cognition." Using a phenomenological and interdisciplinary approach, he offers insight into the experience of cognition and provides a basis for understanding it within the context of human development. Based upon a schematic outline of childhood development, the article presents three modes of human cognition. These modes are then examined from an evolutionary perspective to show how human cognition, from the arrival of representational thought, has developed under the influence of culture more than of biology. This provides instruments for understanding the patterns of cognition within Lubich's text "Look at All the Flowers," showing its historical continuity with other forms of cognition and indicating the significant new elements that it contains.

Slipper's article provides a basis for the third item in this section, Chiara Lubich's "Look upon All the Flowers." This article includes an introduction that deals with the setting, a presentation about the text itself, and its implications. The introduction is followed by "Look upon all the Flowers," dated November 6, 1949.

The fourth article is Jesús Morán's "Transferring Self to Other: Radicalizing Human Being." This article begins by recounting recent developments in philosophical anthropology that provide background for understanding the key elements concerning what it is to be human that underlie "Look upon all the Flowers." Morán begins by examining self-transcendence, noting how Chiara Lubich's context of mutuality, her reciprocal transfer of self to the other, is a shift from the starting point of previous spiritualities. He then looks at the metaphysical structure that supports this way of being and explores three core categories: transcendence, relationality, and corporeality. These underpin relationships according to the pattern of the Trinity that take people beyond individual relationships, and at the same time beyond their mutual relatedness.

The fifth article, by Hubertus Blaumeiser and Brendan Leahy, is "When the Tree has Blossomed Fully: Reflections on the Church." The authors discuss "Look upon All the Flowers" as a seminal text and suggest that the Second Vatican Council's vision of the church can be realized through mutual personal relationships that reflect the very life of the Trinity. The model of such relationships, and therefore of the Christian community and of the church itself, is Mary at the foot of the cross, who "lost" God with her for the God who is present in every human being. "Look

upon All the Flowers" demonstrates how that Marian profile can be lived out individually, in local communities, and in the church so as to generate living cells of the Mystical Body, renewing both church and society.

Implication of Paradise '49 for Society and Culture

This section contains five articles. The first, by Maria Voce, is "The Charism of Unity in Dialogue with Contemporary Culture and the Paradigm of Fraternity." Voce begins by asking: Does Chiara Lubich's charism of unity have something to say to contemporary culture? She presents Lubich's experience of unity and her vision for contributing to a more united and peaceful world based on Paradise '49. Voce presents the difficult cultural situations in Europe and Latin America and the positive social, economic, and political changes that have recently taken place as well as the challenges that remain. She presents Lubich's 1998 visit to Latin America that led her to propose an international interreligious and intercultural "360 degree dialogue" based on fraternity. Voce explains what fraternity meant to Lubich in the history of her own experience, in the Focolare spirituality of unity, and how it can be a paradigm for cultural development that addresses the challenges of the global community today.

The second article, by Antonio Maria Baggio, is "Love of all Loves: Politics and Fraternity in the Charismatic Vision of Chiara Lubich." Baggio presents the original meaning that Chiara gave to fraternity based on her mystical life. He points out that there is a "logic" of fraternity that arises from her Trinitarian experience. While the concept of fraternity is found in the scriptural and religious background of the Christian faith, Chiara's thought on fraternity is expressed in the context of the Focolare's social outreach, such as in the Movement for Unity in Politics and the Economy of Communion. Baggio proposes that Chiara's notion of fraternity, given its universal human dimension as well as its religious affiliations, is relevant to all societies and cultures.

The third article is Luigino Bruni's "The Economy of Communion: A Project for a Sustainable and Happy Socioeconomic Future." Bruni begins by presenting a picture of today's global economic changes and the issues that have arisen as a consequence: the widening inequality and income gap, as well as the greater correlation between inequality and quality of life than between income (GDP) and quality of life. Inequality, he argues, is a major obstacle to socioeconomic development. Therefore, companies need to expand their range of action to include social and community activities as opportunities for enhancing economic success and the well-being of employees and of the community. Bruni then turns to the Economy of Communion founded by the Focolare, giving its background and its approaches to healing poverty through relational community changes and concrete productive in-

clusion. As a consequence, workers are partners and thus happier and more effective citizens. Bruni concludes with reflections on the nature and purpose of communion formed within business and community life.

The fourth article, by Bernhard Callebaut, is "Economy of Communion: A Sociological Inquiry on a Contemporary Charismatic: Inspiration in Economy and Social Life." Callebaut asks: Is Chiara Lubich's initiative, the Economy of Communion (EoC), an example of a "sudden invention" in the field of the economic activity? EoC, proposed by Lubich, does have some charismatic aspects. Her initiative brings together two functions of society: the economic and the social, symbolically represented by the figures of the entrepreneur and the poor. Callebaut relies on the interpretive framework of Max Weber and his analysis of charismatic leadership, as well as other authors working directly on the relationship between economy and charism. Ultimately, this article discusses the relevance for the contemporary world of the input EoC gives not only at the level of the economic rationality, but to a "culture of communion."

Implications of Paradise '49 for Interreligious Dialogue

The first article in the final section is Donald W. Mitchell's "The Mystical Theology of Chiara Lubich: A Foundation for Interreligious Dialogue in Asia." Mitchell begins with the assumption that Chiara Lubich received a charism that is embodied in her spirituality of unity and that the Trinitarian source of this gift was revealed in the mystical experience of "Paradise '49." The first part of the article reflects on the charism of Chiara's spirituality of unity as lived out in interreligious dialogue. The second part reflects on what has been published about Chiara's mystical illuminations, which Mitchell believes can serve as new sources for dialogue with the East Asian traditions of Buddhism and Confucianism. In the third and final section, he presents his views on how such a dialogue could contribute to a more global Catholic philosophy.

The second article, also by Donald W. Mitchell, is entitled: "Dazzling Darkness: Buddhism and Chiara Lubich's Mystical Writings." Mitchell begins by presenting two experiences of what he terms "dazzling darkness," one in a Christian context and the other in a Buddhist context. He then proposes an explanation for the experience in the context of Buddhist traditions in India and China. In so doing, he connects darkness to suffering and light to Nirvana and Buddha-nature. He then turns to the mystical writings of Chiara Lubich to propose an explanation for the Christian experience and its relation to suffering and the luminosity of God in suffering through Jesus Forsaken. In discussing Lubich's writings, Mitchell also explores her experiences of the relational arising and mutual indwelling of all beings, and the indwelling of the light and love of God in the darkness of suffering. He then com-

pares these insight to the experiences of Buddha-nature, dependent arising, mutual indwelling, and the identity of Nirvana and suffering in Buddhism.

In the third article, "Christian and Hindu Dialogue on the Charism of Unity," Cherylanne Menezes provides an historical introduction to Chiara Lubich and the Focolare Movement's work in interreligious dialogue, with special attention to Christian-Hindu dialogue. It introduces the various personalities and encounters, as well as the spirit that informs this unique experience of dialogue. It makes particular use of Lubich's diary entries that recount her own discovery of dialogue as "one of the most beautiful expressions of love." At one point, Menezes discusses how Chiara shared some of her experiences from Paradise '49 with Hindu scholars, and their positive response from a Hindu point of view. Finally, Menezes introduces the innovative and fruitful experience of Christian-Hindu symposiums organized between Indian scholars and those associated with the Focolare Movement in India.

The fourth article is Roberto Catalano's "Spiritual Friendship and Interreligious Dialogue: The Experience of Chiara Lubich and Nikkyo Niwano." Catalano introduces the spiritual friendship between Chiara Lubich and Rev. Nikkyō Niwano, founders and longtime presidents, respectively, of the Focolare Movement and of the Risshō Kōsei-kai. The two movements, though founded in completely different geographical, social, and religious contexts, developed strong ties and collaborations based on friendship and dialogue. Catalano also evaluates the role each of the two spiritual leaders played with respect to their religious experiences.

In the final article, "A Buddhist-Catholic Dialogue of Life in Japan: Finding Shared Values for Global Collaboration for the Common Good," Cinto Busquet analyzes the global dialogues between members of the Risshō Kōsei-kai and the Focolare Movement. This unique relationship, Busquet points out, is founded on friendship and a deep spiritual unity based on their own scriptural and spiritual foundations. From their dialogues of life and collaboration these Christians and Buddhists have discovered common values based on worldviews that, in some cases, are quite different. Their shared values have provided the basis for their interreligious projects that seek solutions to the global issues we all face today.

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