

***Jesus Forsaken* in Chiara Lubich: Locus of Encounter for Philosophy, Religions and Transcendence**

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Philosophy is often called the science of asking the question "Why?" Many who study philosophy ask questions that affect humanity. Are these persons doing philosophy? Foresi¹ asserts that this method is still "artificial...academic, that remain external to the person." He affirms: "True philosophy begins when one 'awakens,' at a certain moment in his life, and discovers to exist."² It is from such awe that philosophy begins: to feel the awe of one's very existence or that of another and of the surrounding creation. It is about "going out" from the visible world wherein one is immersed, and to become aware that beyond this world, there is our true existence. Confronted with this perception, everything changes. One sees the world with a new eye as he goes beyond what was notional and simply acquired. There one finds himself alone and begins to open up to the possibility of knowing oneself in depth. Only then, one is in "philosophy," in the love of wisdom.

If somebody allows himself to be inhabited by this awe, he will realize that he exists because the Existence exists; that is, Another exists that is the absolute existence. A personal relationship opens for him with Another. This leads to the discovery of the reality of the others, all of creation. Thus, doing philosophy becomes dialogue with others in the dialogue with Another. Christianity revealed this great reality: God is Love. Consequently, to think is to be in communion with

¹ Pasquale Foresi, *Conversazioni di Filosofia*. (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2001), 11.

² Ibid.

all the other beings in the universe. Thus, dialogue becomes one's way of philosophizing, of thinking.

The theme "Philosophy, Religion and Transcendence" put in this context is highly relevant to our globalized contemporary society. It is from such viewpoint that the author attempts to present a possible locus of encounter for the three topics drawn from the thought and experience of Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, who was awarded a doctorate in philosophy "honoris causa" by the De La Salle University in Mexico City in 1997 for her innovative approach to philosophy.

The Discovery of *Jesus Forsaken*

Through a providential encounter on January 24, 1944, Lubich understood that the apex of God's love for humanity is in the Son's suffering on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). Chiara "contemplated in him the height of his love because it was the height of his suffering."³ Thus, her *choice of God-Love* as the ideal of her life became the exclusive "*choice of Jesus Forsaken*, which is the living demonstration of God's love here on earth."⁴ Lubich affirms that the radical choice of Jesus Forsaken has extraordinary effects: "It is the *key to open every dialogue*, to realize every unity, so that the Risen One will always be present"⁵ both in individuals and in the collectivity.

The Love for *Jesus Forsaken* in Practice

The first *focolarinas* decided to choose Jesus in his greatest pain of the Father's abandonment as their Ideal, their way of following Him.⁶ From that time on, Lubich and her companions recognized the countenance of Jesus Forsaken not only in their personal sufferings but also in the sufferings of their neighbors, who were lonely, abandoned; in the divisions, traumas and gaps in families, between generations,

³ Michel Vandeleene (ed.), *Chiara Lubich. Essential Writings. Spirituality. Dialogue. Culture* (New York: New City Press, 2007), 22.

⁴ Chiara Lubich, "Inesistenza" in: *Costruendo il Castello Esteriore* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2002), 51. (Writer's translation of the Italian text): "Chi vive il nostro Ideale fa una scelta: Dio Amore. Ma essa, poi, non può non precisare che nella scelta di Gesù abbandonato, che è la viva dimostrazione dell'amore di Dio qui in terra."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Chiara Lubich, *Unity and Jesus Forsaken* (Manila: New City Press, 1985), 46.

between the rich and the poor, at times within the Catholic Church itself. Later on, the *focolarinas* recognized Jesus Forsaken also in the divisions among the various Christian Churches, among the religions, and among those who believe and those without any religious affiliation. Discovering the face of Jesus Forsaken in the various types of division in the Church and in humanity, Lubich states: "Jesus forsaken seems to be the God of our times."⁷ In particular, Jesus Forsaken "who, though he was in the form of God ... emptied himself," as Paul writes (Phil 2:6-7), "has opened a providential way for dialogue with the faithful of the religious traditions of the East."⁸

Theological Intuitions on *Jesus Forsaken*

a. The Apex of the Father's Revelation

In the experience and theological perspective that springs from the Focolare spirituality of unity, the abandonment is not just one particular aspect of Jesus among others. It is the reality that expresses the deepest essence of the event of Jesus himself; therefore the revelation of God and of creation. In a particular period of light in 1949, Lubich understood Jesus Forsaken as the "pupil of the eye of God," a symbol of being known by, and of knowing God. Thus, she wrote:

Jesus is Jesus Forsaken. This is because Jesus is Savior and Redeemer; and he redeems when he pours the divine onto humanity through the wound of his abandonment, which is the pupil of the eye of God on the world: an infinite void through which God looks upon us: the window of God opened wide onto the world and the window of humanity through which it sees God.

The eye of God on the world is the heart of Christ, but the pupil is that wound. The eye is the heart, for though the eye is the organ for seeing (in the Trinity the eye of God is the Word), God who is love can see only with his heart. In him, love and light are one.⁹

Coda affirms that the image of the eye – as a symbol of being known by and of knowing God – is typical of mystical traditions in every

⁷ Vandeleene, *Essential Writings*, 206.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Piero Coda, "Reflections on Theological Knowledge" in: Schindler, D., *An Introduction to the Abba School*, 48-50.

epoch and place. For Thomas Aquinas, faith is knowing "as it were with the eye of God."¹⁰ Catherine of Siena defines faith as "the pupil of the eye of intelligence."¹¹

Lubich's image goes further still. Foremost, she confirms the reciprocity that is constitutive of knowing God: humanity knows God because he first knows it. If the Word is the eye with which God knows, then Jesus Forsaken, the Word Incarnate in the fullness of the divine purpose, is "the pupil of the eye of God on the world."¹² Secondly, Lubich underlines that in order to know God, one must transcend the human mode of knowing by letting it go.¹³ Bonaventure says that at the summit of the road to knowing God, one must make an exodus from this world to the Father through Christ crucified. He wrote on this at La Verna, while contemplating the stigmata of Francis, his "being crucified with Christ."¹⁴

b. The Nothingness that is Love

Lubich sees the depth of the crucified in Jesus Forsaken, who "loses God for God." She wrote: "After giving his own blood, Jesus offers (not "afterward" in terms of time but of value) his spiritual death, a divine death, giving us God. He is like a flower in full bloom, completely revealed."¹⁵ In an undated essay of 1950, Lubich elaborates:

After hours of agony, he cries, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Cf. Coda, Ibid., 49-50. "The mystics and the great theologians say the same thing when they recover the centrality of the 'theology of the cross' as the principal form of doing theology; or when they speak of an 'apophatic' (negative) theology, which does not simply deny with one's intelligence the still partial and provisional knowledge one has acquired of God, but denies the intelligence itself in order to know God, not 'humanly' but 'divinely' – with one's own intelligence, but as 'lost' and 'found' again anew in Christ."

¹⁴ Ibid., 50.

¹⁵ Chiara Lubich, *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken in the History and Life of the Focolare Movement, from its Birth in 1943, until the Dawn of the Third Millennium*. (New York: New City Press, 2001), 24.

The union with his Father must have been the deepest feeling for him, who is the Son of God, 'til he no longer felt it. Love vanishes, all light is obliterated, wisdom is silent. He feels as if he were separated from his Father, who he had said would always be one with him: "The Father and I are one." (John 10:30)....

This is the apex of his Passion, Redemption, the most beautiful expression of love. He loves as God with a love, which is as great as God himself is. He makes himself nothing to make us everything. He makes himself "us," "But I am a worm, not a man..." (Psalm 21:7), in order to transform us into him, into children of God....

"He emptied himself..." (Phil. 2:7). It is the moment when he most appears to us as God, God-love who gives everything.¹⁶

In another writing, Lubich clarifies the above statement:

It is a *real* abandonment for the humanity of Jesus, because God leaves it in this state without intervening. It is an *unreal* abandonment for his divinity, because Jesus being God is one with the Father and with the Holy Spirit and cannot be separated – at most he can be distinct. But in this case distinction is not pain: it is love.¹⁷

On this regard Maritain writes that suffering "exists in God in an infinitely more real manner than it does in us, but without imperfection, because in God suffering is in absolute unity with love."¹⁸

Pope John Paul II affirmed:

Jesus' cry on the Cross ... is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, "abandoned" by the Father, he "abandons" himself into the hands of the Father ... More than an experience of physical pain, his Passion is an agonizing suffering of the soul. Theological tradition has not failed to ask how Jesus could possibly experience at the same time his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment. The simultaneous presence of these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects is rooted in the fathomless depths of the hypostatic union (NMI 26).

¹⁶ Chiara Lubich, "A Little Harmless Manifesto" in: *New City* 8:2/3 (1973), 18-20.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Scritti di Filosofia (Writings on Philosophy)* (Rome: 1978), II:291.

Jesus Forsaken: Locus of Encounter

Initially, when Lubich and her first companions decided to love *Jesus Forsaken* in every suffering they would encounter, they did not meditate nor formulate the doctrine that lie beneath his being forsaken. Rather, the group discovered his forsakenness as the key to recompose every unity. Soon they realized that *Jesus forsaken* did not present himself only as the answer to the existential question of humanity. Lubich explains:

He is God who asks God "why", who asks the reason for a severed relationship that seems to touch the very unity of God! He is certainly the question, so to speak, carried to its deepest, most radical expression, where no human question dares to go. Thus, he seems to be the one who best represents human intelligence in the face of mystery.

At the same time, he cries out his great "why" precisely in order to give us the answer to the many "why" which are more properly the object of philosophical reflection.¹⁹

Lubich enumerates two aspects of philosophical reflection that can find an answer in *Jesus Forsaken*, namely: (1) the mystery of being; and (2) the significance of creation.

a. Jesus Forsaken and the Mystery of Being

The prologue of the Gospel according to John opens to us a luminous overview on the mystery of Being in its identity with the Word. Foresi elucidates: "The Father in generating the Word, expresses Himself in Him in the totality of his Being, so that the Word is no longer a Word of Being but is the Being that is the Word and is the Word that is Being."²⁰ Furthermore, Foresi affirms: "Perceiving the being that I am, I open up to the perception of Being that, in creating me, gives himself to me, meaning that he participates to me what He is: Trinity... Hence, Being, in giving itself, becomes and, as it gives itself, remains."²¹

For St. Paul, Jesus Crucified is the fullness manifestation of the "mystery of God" (Col 2:2) to the world. Hence, the Apostle wants to know and announce Jesus Crucified alone (1 Cor 2:2). Chiara Lubich

¹⁹ Vandeleene, *Essential Writings*, 210.

²⁰ Pasquale Foresi, *Note di Filosofia* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 2004), 124.

²¹ Ibid.

proceeds along the way of St. Paul penetrating into the depths of these words, opening new expanses of human-divine light. Lubich defines being, in its essence: "being is. It is the acknowledgement of that great ocean of existence in which human beings are immersed in communion with everyone and everything."²² Chiara affirms:

This being – which all things have in common and for which they are not simply a nothingness – reveals, in a natural manifestation, that Being which none of them is, but which they all announce. Their becoming, their limits, their very ceasing to exist is the language in which it is stated that the being of all that exists is rooted in a Being that simply and absolutely *IS*.²³

The course of philosophy in the West has witnessed the clouding over of these initial certainties. Consciousness of self has been, and is, lived as negation of the objectivity of being; thus closed itself off from the Absolute Being. This eventually led to the crisis that marked the recent centuries. Is it true that consciousness of self and being – as the affirmation of reality in itself to the point of acknowledging the Absolute Being – cannot co-exist?

Some people think that to affirm self implies a struggle against all that is not self, since what is not self is perceived as a limit and, what is more, as a threat to the integrity of self. In this context, Lubich sustains: "In that terrible moment of his passion, Jesus forsaken tells us that though the consciousness of his subjectivity appears to be diminishing as he is, as it were, made nothing, in that very moment it reaches its fullness."²⁴

For Urs von Balthasar, Jesus Forsaken shows to the human person that it is in self-giving, in losing oneself in the other person that one truly is. The author explains:

In giving himself, the Father does not give something (or even everything) that he *has* but all that he *is* ... so the Father's being passes over, without remainder, to the begotten Son.... This total self-giving, to which the Son and the Spirit respond by an equal self-giving, is a kind of "death," a first, radical "kenosis"; as one might say, it is a kind of "super-death."²⁵

²² Vandeleene, *Ibid.*, 210.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Vandeleene, *Essential Writings*, 211.

²⁵ H.U. von Balthasar, "Theodrama. Theological Dramatic Theory V: The Last Act" in: Coda, *Ibid.*, 55.

In her address after the conferral of the doctorate in philosophy *honoris causa* by the La Salle University (Mexico City) on June 7, 1997, Lubich expounds:

With his being reduced to nothing, accepted out of love for the Father to whom he re-abandons himself ("Into your hands I commend my spirit" [Lk 23:46], Jesus shows us that I am myself, not when I close myself off from the other, but rather when I give myself, when out of love I lose myself in the other. If, for example, I have a flower and I give it to someone, certainly I deprive myself of it, and in depriving myself, I am losing something of myself (i.e., non-being); in reality, precisely because I give that flower, love grows in me (i.e., being). Therefore, my subjectivity is when it is not, out of love; that is, when out of love it is completely transferred into the other.²⁶

Therefore, Jesus forsaken is the greatest revelation of consciousness, viewed as self-affirmation, precisely when he gives himself to the other, to an otherness that is being. True consciousness of self is born from the communion with being: a communion in which consciousness seems to lose itself but, in reality, it finds itself, it is.²⁷ Hence, Lubich concludes:

Jesus forsaken thus enlightens being, revealing it as love. And with this he reveals to us that the Absolute Being is itself love, as affirmed in the first letter of John (1 Jn 4:8, 12).

It is love precisely in the dynamic relationship that exists among the three divine Persons, One with the Other, One for the Other, One in the Other...

In the relationship of the three divine Persons, each one is love, each one is completely, by not being: because each one is, perichoretically, in the other Person, in eternal self-giving.

In the light of the Trinity, being reveals itself, if we can say this, as guarding deep within itself the non-being that is gift of self: not the non-being that negates being, rather the non-being that reveals being as love: *being that is the three divine Persons*.²⁸

²⁶ Vandeleene, Ibid. Cf. Chiara Lubich "For a Philosophy That Stems from Christ" in: *Communio* 25 (1998), 753; *New Humanity Review* 1:3 (1998), 5-17.

²⁷ Vandeleene, Ibid., 211.

²⁸ Ibid., 212.

Lubich sees the abandonment in relationship to the life of the Trinity. She states:

Is not God after all One, distinct in three Persons, contemporaneously One and Three, in a time so to speak outside time, where Love lives, where the Father is perennially generating the Word, and the Holy Spirit perennially proceeds as a divine Person himself too, simultaneously uniting and distinguishing the Father and the Son, so that they are One and they are Three?

Could not that forsakenness have been a “new act”, so to speak, like that which occurred in the incarnation, when the Trinity decreed that the Word become flesh? Or in the resurrection, when the power of the Father in the Holy Spirit revived the incarnate Son?

The Father, seeing Jesus obedient even to the point of being ready to regenerate his children, to give to him a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), sees Jesus so similar to himself, equal to himself as if another Father, that he distinguishes him from himself.²⁹

b. Jesus Forsaken and the Significance of Creation

The Hebrew-Christian revelation envisioned the world as the creation of God, of a personal God and therefore destined to have a lasting relationship with him. The world thus has a value in and of itself as well as its own autonomy. Moreover, the world finds its eschatological fulfillment in the person of the Word incarnate and risen, the only “You” of the Father, who recapitulates all in himself. Therefore, according to revelation, the world should be seen as filled with the presence of God in his Word, through the Spirit.

In the Western society today, the world has gradually become empty of meaning. The groaning of creation, of which St. Paul speaks (Rm 8:22) seems no longer to be heard. It has been covered by what Heidegger called the “idle chatter of existence,” and therefore of an “inauthentic” culture.³⁰ Is this an irreversible crisis or rather the slow birthing of a new world? Lubich believes that *Jesus forsaken* can shed light and meaning to this drama. She affirms:

²⁹ Lubich, *The Cry of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken*, 25.

³⁰ G. Reale, D. Antiseri, *Il Pensiero occidentale dalle origini a oggi* / 3 (The Western Thought from its Origins till Today/3) cited in : Vandeleene, *Ibid.*, 213.

Jesus forsaken experience in himself and took upon himself the non-being of all those separated from the source of being: he took upon himself the "vanity of vanities" (Eccl 1:2).

Out of love, he made his own this non-being that we call negative and transformed it into himself, into the positive non-being that is love, as revealed in the resurrection. Jesus Forsaken made the Holy Spirit overflow into creation, thus becoming "mother" of the new creation.

Certainly, this event is *still* in the process of developing: but in the risen Christ, and in Mary assumed into heaven with him, it is already accomplished. In a certain sense, it is already a reality for the Church, his Mystical Body.

If we live in mutual love, which brings Christ among us, and we are nourished by the Eucharist, which makes us become Christ as a community and as individuals, and therefore Church, we can perceive the penetration of the Spirit of God into the heart of all beings, into each one and into the entire cosmos.

And through the Holy Spirit we intuit the existence of a nuptial relationship between the Uncreated and created because in becoming incarnate, the Word aligned himself with creation thereby divinizing it and recapitulating it in himself.

This wide and majestic vision makes us think of the entrance of all creation one day into the bosom of the Father.³¹

Lubich affirms that a sign of the above can be found in the human body upon death, when it is given back to the earth. If it has been nourished by the Eucharist, therefore *Christified*, could it not be considered Eucharist for nature? The human body, as such, "although apparently transformed into earth, in reality acts mysteriously as a seed for the transfiguration of the cosmos into 'new heavens and new earth' (Is 66:22; 2 Pt 3:13)." ³²

Conclusion

The great contemporary thinkers, like Maritain and Przywara, foresaw the possibility of progress in the search for the truth precisely on the understanding of being as love, as revealed in the cross of Christ. This paper has illustrated how Chiara Lubich's intuitions on *Jesus*

³¹ Vandeleene, *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 214.

Forsaken as the expression of the height of suffering and, thus, the height of love of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, can enlighten people on *being* and on the *significance of creation*, two dominant questions for humanity today.

During her first Asian trip in December 1981, Chiara understood that this aspect of Jesus' suffering, which led him to total annihilation, "has a special attraction" for believers of the Oriental religions, who practice the "Four Noble Truths to extinguish suffering."³³

In fact, the desire for the Transcendent is innate to human beings. Most religions have developed ways of attaining it through their various spiritualities; thereby attesting that the quest for holiness is universal. Human beings will sooner meet one another "if they first vertically seek union with God, with the Infinite, with the Transcendent before they horizontally move to encounter one another."³⁴

From all of the above, it is rightful to conclude that Lubich's concept of *Jesus Forsaken* can provide a *locus of encounter* for philosophy, religions and transcendence. □

³³ Chiara Lubich, *Incontri con l'Oriente* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1986), 61 (Writer's translation of the Italian text): "Mi è sembrato di capire quale possa essere la via per portar Gesù ai buddhisti: amare proprio Gesù abbandonato e svelare a loro qualcosa del suo mistero. È con l'amore per Lui che, come per un'alchimia divina, il dolore si tramuta in gioia. E loro hanno appunto le quattro nobili verità per estinguere il dolore."

³⁴ Francis Arinze, *Meeting Other Believers* (Herefordshire: Gracewing Fowler Wright Books, 1997), 64.