

## GIFT THAT BECOMES COMMUNION: PERICHORESIS, EUCHARISTIC ETHOS, AND RELATIONALITY AS KEYS TO A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

### DON QUE SE CONVIERTE EN COMUNIÓN: PERIJÓRESIS, ETHOS EUCARÍSTICO Y RELACIÓN COMO CLAVES PARA UNA ANTROPOLOGÍA TEOLÓGICA

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#### Abstract:

This article proposes a theological anthropology centered on the Trinitarian dynamic that is articulated by the Eucharist. Starting from the hermeneutical metaphor of the spiral staircase, perichoresis, the reciprocal relational interpenetration of the divine Persons, when actualized by the action of the Spirit, reveals a communal anthropology whose historical and sacramental embodiment is found in the Eucharistic ethos. After explaining the Christological-kenotic foundation of this proposal, a pneumatological reading of history is developed that considers the Spirit as the principle that actualizes Christ's gift until eschatological consummation. Two experiential paradigms are contrasted: *inhabitation* (inner experience of love, with Augustinian and mystical roots) and *cohabitation* (communal experience of communion, exemplified in the spirituality of Chiara Lubich), culminating in an integrated proposal, *coinhabitation*, articulated by intentionality, corporeality and reciprocity. The Eucharist appears as the sacramental place where memory, presence and promise are brought into tension, and from where the Church receives and transmits a relational ethic capable of responding to cultural fragmentation. The text combines patristic, theological and magisterial sources with contemporary proposals, suggesting avenues for theological formation, community pastoral care and future research on the social translation of a communal anthropology.

**Keywords:** Trinitarian anthropology, Eucharistic ethos, Perichoresis, Coinhabitation/communion

#### Resumen:

Este artículo desarrolla una antropología teológica trinitaria centrada en la Eucaristía. Utilizando la metáfora de la escalera de caracol como guía hermenéutica, sostiene que la perijóresis, la interpenetración recíproca de las Personas divinas, cuando es actualizada por el Espíritu, da lugar a una antropología comunitaria cuya realización histórica y sacramental se encuentra en el ethos eucarístico. Tras fundamentar la propuesta en una cristología kenótica, el texto elabora una lectura pneumatológica de la historia que concibe al Espíritu como el principio que actualiza el don de Cristo hacia la consumación escatológica. Se contrastan dos paradigmas experienciales: la inhabitación (experiencia interior del amor, con raíces agustinianas y místicas) y la cohabitación (experiencia comunitaria de comunión, como en la espiritualidad de Chiara Lubich), lo cual conduce a un modelo integrado, la coinhabitación, estructurado en torno a la intencionalidad, la corporeidad y la reciprocidad. La Eucaristía se presenta como el lugar sacramental donde convergen la memoria, la presencia y la promesa, y de donde la Iglesia recibe una orientación ética y relacional capaz de responder a la fragmentación cultural. El estudio combina fuentes patrísticas, sistemáticas y magisteriales con propuestas teológicas contemporáneas, y ofrece implicaciones para la formación teológica, la práctica pastoral y futuras investigaciones sobre la traducción social de una antropología comunitaria.

**Palabras clave:** Antropología trinitaria, ethos eucarístico, perijóresis, co-inhabitación / comunión.

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## Introduction

In recent decades, interest in an anthropology modelled on Trinitarian comprehension has intensified, primarily as a response to the need to move beyond individualistic or purely functional approaches to the idea of the human person. From this perspective, contemporary theology has noted that the category of *communion*, which stems from the Trinitarian understanding, offers a comprehensive and fruitful horizon for approaching personal and, consequently, social existence. This is the proposal of Piero Coda, who, continuing the teaching of John Paul II and the reflections of CELAM on the culture of encounter, has developed a Trinitarian reading of anthropology as a generative principle of thought and praxis<sup>3</sup>. It is, therefore, an effort to re-read the human condition not only from the perspective of classical philosophical categories, but also from modern reflections<sup>4</sup> and from God's self-revelation and self-communication in history through the Spirit<sup>5</sup>.

From this perspective<sup>6</sup>, the metaphor of the spiral staircase, which we propose as a hermeneutical image, aims to emphasize both the dynamism and the circularity of the path of communion. It is not a linear or ascending itinerary in the strict sense, but a movement that constantly returns to itself, as does Trinitarian life, but each time at a higher level of depth. The perichoretic paradigm allows us to visualize this dynamism: communion does not annul difference, but integrates and enhances it, generating a way of life in which the gift of self becomes a condition of possibility for personal identity<sup>7</sup>.

All in all, why place the Eucharist as the articulating axis of this anthropological and Trinitarian understanding? Because it sacramentally and performatively concentrates the internal logic of the Trinity that becomes communion for all men: the Father gives and gives himself to the Son; the Son gives himself to the Father, on the Cross and in the resurrection, and finally gives his Spirit (Jn 19, 30); and the Spirit opens this giving, to every human being, in the life of the Church. This *Eucharistic ethos* thus becomes a place of learning communion<sup>8</sup>. It is understood, then, that this is not merely ritual participation, but the assumption of a lifestyle marked by gratuitousness, reciprocity, and openness to others: a gift that becomes communion<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> This renewed dialogue appears both in academic spaces and in ecclesial initiatives and in the systematic reception of Piero Coda, whose recent synthesis has reignited the contemporary discussion on God's self-communication and its anthropological consequences. Cf. P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad: La irrupción de Dios en la revelación y la teología*, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 2021, 63-77.

<sup>4</sup> Above all, with regard to the otherness of Buber and Levinas. Cf. A. BEGRICH, "El encuentro con el otro según la ética de Levinas", *Teología y Cultura* 7 (2007) 71-81; M. THEUNISSEN, *El otro: estudios sobre la ontología social contemporánea*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Ciudad de México 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Based on the theological principle proposed by the Second Vatican Council: "God in his wisdom decided to reveal himself and make known the mystery of his will, through which men, through Christ, the Incarnate Word, have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and become partakers of the divine nature. Consequently, through this revelation, the invisible God speaks to men as friends, moved by his great love, and dwells with them, inviting them to communicate with him and welcoming them into his company. This plan of revelation is carried out through deeds and words intrinsically connected with each other, so that the works accomplished by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the doctrine and deeds signified by the words, and the words, for their part, proclaim the works and clarify the mystery contained in them. But the intimate truth about God and about human salvation is revealed to us through the revelation in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation. CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución Dogmática Dei Verbum, sobre la divina revelación*, Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1965, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. P. P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología", en: A. BERTOLINI – E. CAMBON – P. CODA – D. LÓPEZ – M. C. LUCCHETTI – CH. BINGEMER – J. C. SCANNONE – R. TOMICHÁ CHARUPÁ – J. VALDIVIA – G. ZARAZAGA, *Antropología Trinitaria para nuestros pueblos*, CELAM, Bogotá, 2014, 25-50; P. P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología II", en: A. BERTOLINI – E. CAMBON – P. CODA – D. LÓPEZ – M. C. LUCCHETTI – CH. BINGEMER – J. C. SCANNONE – R. TOMICHÁ CHARUPÁ – J. VALDIVIA – G. ZARAZAGA, *Antropología Trinitaria para nuestros pueblos*, CELAM, Bogotá 2014, 127-151.

<sup>7</sup> The communal ontology of Orthodox roots, which revitalises the notion of person in relational terms, understands personal existence as being-in-communion. Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2009, 45-63.

<sup>8</sup> Reformulated Western reflection, such as that of Catherine Mowry LaCugna, insists on placing Christian life, not just metaphysical speculation, at the centre of Trinitarian doctrine. Cf. C. M. LACUGNA, *Dios para nosotros: la Trinidad y la vida cristiana*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2002, 515-532.

<sup>9</sup> More recently, there has been a proliferation of studies and ecclesial documents that explicitly link the Eucharistic celebration with synodality, mission, and public ethics, allowing us to speak properly of a *Eucharistic ethos* that transforms subjectivities and community practices. Cf. A. A. SCHMEMMANN, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, Crestwood, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York 1988, 28-42. 1. J. M. CIRAULO, *The Eucharistic Form of God: Hans Urs von Balthasar's Sacramental Theology*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 2022, 63-

The current context reinforces the urgency of this perspective. In the face of cultural fragmentation, social tensions and lost of meaning that mark our time, a Trinitarian anthropology with a Eucharistic center offers a framework for reconciliation and hope.<sup>10</sup> This is not an abstract proposal, but rather a hermeneutical key with practical implications for ecclesial life, pastoral action and intercultural dialogue. In line with what CELAM has called the “culture of encounter,” our proposal seeks to show how the Trinitarian dynamic, actualized in the Eucharist, can inspire concrete processes of fraternity and social integration<sup>11</sup>.

This work is part of a theological systematization effort that, as mentioned above, combines the reading of classical sources with contemporary contributions. The methodology we follow is hermeneutical in nature, in that it interprets the Christian experience from the perspective of Trinitarian revelation, and at the same time comparative, in that it brings together different insights in search of a broader synthesis. This approach aims to situate reflection not on an isolated speculative plane, but within a horizon of fruitfulness for ecclesial praxis and the construction of communion in plural contexts.

A decisive terminological and methodological focus in this research is that of perichoresis (*περιχώρησις*): a patristic concept used to explain the reciprocity of intra-Trinitarian relations, which has been re-evaluated<sup>12</sup>. Recent studies rescue its theological meaning, while warning of the risk of extensive use when it is transferred directly to anthropological or political theories. Between 2019 and 2024, several works have proposed reading perichoresis as the foundation of a theology of solidarity and social cohesion, showing practical applications in contemporary pastoral contexts<sup>13</sup>.

We therefore wish to open the way to a reflection that will follow, step by step, the movement of the spiral staircase of communion. Our purpose is to show how, to the extent that anthropology is understood as participation in the Trinitarian life and as an expression of a *Eucharistic ethos*, the understanding of the subject, the community and the mission of the Church in the world is also transformed. The image of the staircase, in short, will serve as a guide for us to articulate theologically what, in fact, already constitutes the heart of the Christian experience: living from communion and for communion.

## 1. Theology: method and practice

Theology is a science with its own epistemological status, whose main task is to make faith and its experience reasonable. In this sense, it can be understood from Anselm's expression: *fides quaerens intellectum*<sup>14</sup>. However, it is not a mere rational exercise detached from life, but involves the human being in its entirety. Therefore, it is above all a contemplative exercise which, by its very existential nature, demands conversion and transforms subjectivity. In it, an almost perpetual dynamic unfolds between knowing and loving, conceptualized and contemplated on the basis of the Trinitarian *oikonomia* of salvation<sup>15</sup>. Faith seeks to understand based on love for the One who has given it that

81; COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *La sinodalidad en la vida y en la misión de la Iglesia*, Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018, 41–52.

<sup>10</sup> Contemporaneously, models have been proposed that combine person and community without reducing one to the other, introducing methodological and critical lines along the same lines as this research. Cf. M. VOLF, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids-MI 1998, 191–227.

<sup>11</sup> CONSEJO EPISCOPAL LATINOAMERICANO, *Antropología trinitaria: hacia una cultura del encuentro*, CELAM, Bogotá 2019, 55–68.

<sup>12</sup> A very comprehensive study of the concept can be found in: L. MATEO SECO, “Perichóresis y circumincessio”, *Scripta Theologica* 35 (2003/2) 507–515.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. D. MOLNAR, “Perichoresis and the Boundaries of Salvation: Rethinking Rahner and Barth”, *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 21.3 (2019) 284–303; C. TSAKIRIDOU, “Perichoresis and Social Solidarity: From Cappadocian Fathers to Contemporary Theology” *Open Theology* 6 (2020) 147–163.

<sup>14</sup> SAN ANSELMO DE CANTERBURY, “Proslogion”, en: J. MARÍAS (trad.), *Obras completas. Vol. I*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 1952, Pról., 99.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. CODA, “Trinidad y Antropología”..., 42.

very direction; and love, in turn, seeks to know better that which it loves. To love, then, implies wanting to know and draw closer to the Beloved, so that theology constitutes a path of reciprocity between intelligence enlightened by faith and love transformed by the knowledge of God. As Hans Urs von Balthasar pointed out, theology cannot be dissociated from the form of Christ, for the incarnate Logos is the place where the truth of God and the truth of man intertwine<sup>16</sup>.

This contemplative character of theology means that its exercise cannot be reduced to a purely deductive or argumentative logic. Rather, it is a wisdom that participates in mystery, as Vladimir Lossky emphasizes: Orthodox theology, from which the categories for understanding and explaining the mystery of God arise, cannot be understood outside of mystical experience, as an openness to divine life<sup>17</sup>. Christian theology, therefore, is born of contemplation, unfolds in critical reflection, and returns to prayer and praxis. The circle between *lex credendi*, *lex orandi*, and *lex credendi* is therefore not only a methodological resource, but also an expression of the way in which revelation becomes life in the Church. Karl Rahner insisted that every theological treatise must ultimately be Trinitarian, since the God who has revealed himself in the economy of salvation is the same triune God in his immanent mystery<sup>18</sup>.

Now, there are two fundamental truths on which this contemplative exercise is based and which specify the Christian faith: the Incarnation of the Word and the Trinity; or, appealing to Greek categories, *kenosis* and *perichoresis*. These two truths outline the horizon from which the relationship between God and man and between man and God is explained<sup>19</sup>.

The first truth, that Jesus is true God and true man, consubstantial with the Father according to his divinity and consubstantial with men in his humanity<sup>20</sup>, affirms that Jesus is the true and complete expression of man because he is, at the same time, the true and complete expression of God. The definition of the year 433, which would remain intact until the Council of Chalcedon, is not limited to an abstract Christological formula, but decisively determines the understanding of the human being: in Christ, not only who God is, is revealed, but also who man is<sup>21</sup>. As Joseph Ratzinger has pointed out, the unity of the two natures shows that the truth of man is not found in self-sufficiency, but in openness to the Other, in the capacity for relationship<sup>22</sup>. The second truth, that Jesus is the Son/Logos of the Father and as such the second person of the Trinity in perpetual relationship with the Father and the Spirit, affirms that Jesus is the expression of God as the Son of the Father made flesh. Hence, Christology can never be separated from Trinitarian doctrine: the historical Jesus is inseparable from the eternal Son who proceeds from the Father in the Spirit.

From this double mystery, kenotic and perichoretic, a decisive truth is revealed: "man recognizes himself and becomes an expression of God in Jesus; God is recognized as God and man is recognized and realized as man in relation to God"<sup>23</sup>. In Christ, therefore, what it means to be human is illuminated from a threefold perspective: ontological, in terms of relationship in God; eschatological, in terms of relationship towards God; and protological, in terms of relationship from God. These three dimensions are echoed in Paul's famous expression at the Areopagus: "in Him we live and move and have our

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theodrama II: The Persons in Christ*, Encuentro, Madrid 1992, 41–59.

<sup>17</sup> V. LOSSKY, *Teología mística de la Iglesia de Oriente*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2007, 37–54.

<sup>18</sup> K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1991, 21–33.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología" ..., 45.

<sup>20</sup> This dogmatic formulation comes from the formula of union of Cyril of Alexandria and John of Antioch from the year 433, after the Council of Ephesus, which would end up settling the theological and anthropological discussion of the two schools. Cf. DH 271.

<sup>21</sup> "In reality, the mystery of man is only clarified in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of the one who was to come, that is, Christ our Lord, Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes known to him the sublimity of his vocation. It is no wonder, then, that all the truths set forth here find their source and their crown in Christ". CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución pastoral Gaudium et Spes, sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual*, Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1965, 22.

<sup>22</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Introducción al cristianismo*, Sígueme, Salamanca 2001, 209–223.

<sup>23</sup> P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología" ..., 42.

being" (Acts 17, 28); and they reveal, in the Trinity, the horizon, the foundation, the truth, the knowledge, the purpose and the origin of man. As Piero Coda emphasizes, Trinitarian anthropology does not add an external element to the reflection on the person, but constitutes the starting point and hermeneutical criterion of all Christian understanding of the human being<sup>24</sup>.

Consequently, theology is configured as an exercise shaped by the Trinity in a relational way. Its object is not an abstract concept of divinity, but the living God who communicates as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the history of salvation. To think theologically, then, is to think in terms of the logic of communion, and therefore theological reflection must deepen its understanding of Trinitarian doctrine and its relationship to anthropology<sup>25</sup>. It follows that theological study must be exercised as a reflection with, for, and in the Other/others. With the Other, because theology is born of dialogue with the God revealed in Christ; for the other, because all reflection has as its horizon the building up of the Church and service to humanity; and in the other, because only in concrete relationality, communal and ecclesial or synodal if you will, is the truth of theological thought verified. The challenge, therefore, is not only to think about the Trinity, but to think trinitarianly<sup>26</sup>.

## 2. Encounter, experience and mysticism

This understanding of theology brings us face to face with other categories worthy of study. Encounter, first of all, is the focus on which the experience of God revolves. However, this must be considered as "the event of God in the life of man, created for this encounter and destined for this event. In Johannine language, it is the reciprocal 'dwelling' (*menein*), in Jesus, of God in the creature and of the creature in God"<sup>27</sup>. Encounter is therefore not a specific, finite episode, but rather the hermeneutical key that reveals the dynamism of the relationship between the Creator and the creature: being created *for* the encounter and, at the same time, *in* the encounter, which is renewed daily. In this horizon, the Trinitarian *circuminsessio* consists fundamentally not only in moving towards (*circuminsessio*), but also in remaining in, thus revealing that the relationship with God is not an ephemeral transition but a transforming permanence<sup>28</sup>.

Now, these categories seem complex for contemporary anthropology, perhaps because they have been semantically emptied by the trivialized use of terms such as 'experience' or 'spirituality'. The Christian tradition, however, preserves a horizon of meaning with great depth and profundity. Raimon Panikkar, for example, in his reflection on the theandric experience, recalled that the encounter with God is not merely a subjective inner perception, but a real participation in the Mystery that communicates and transcends itself<sup>29</sup>. Experience, understood in theological terms, transcends the psychological and the sociological: it is an event of grace that bursts forth and establishes a new way of being in relationship.

This renewed horizon of anthropological-trinitarian understanding gives "an impulse to read in this key the face of the triune God and the event of 'trinitization' that is brought about by Jesus"<sup>30</sup>. In effect, it is a process in which the human person is introduced into divine life, not by their own efforts, but by the gift (*χάρις*) that makes Trinitarian indwelling possible. St John of the Cross expressed this forcefully when he spoke of

<sup>24</sup> Cf. P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 63–77.

<sup>25</sup> This was Kasper's thinking and development when he stated that the Trinity is the key to understanding the whole Christian mystery. Cf. W. KASPER, *El Dios de Jesucristo*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1985, 288–304.

<sup>26</sup> As John Zizioulas stated, being itself is given as communion, and theology must reflect this logic in its way of thinking and in its ecclesial praxis. Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad...*, 45–63; P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología"..., 50.

<sup>27</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad...*, 52–55; K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad...*, 28–30; P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> R. PANIKKAR, *La experiencia de Dios*, PPC, Madrid 1994, 27–39.

<sup>30</sup> P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología"..., 47.

'transformation into the Beloved', pointing out that mystical union does not erase personal identity, but fulfils it in communion<sup>31</sup>.

In other words, man's insertion into divine life is the encounter considered in a definitive way, but it is not an abstraction: it is verified in the concrete history of each believer and of the ecclesial community. As Hans Urs von Balthasar warns, this gift "is not realized, that is, it does not become historically lived and witnessed reality in thinking, until the form of the crucified Logos becomes the form of our way of thinking and speaking about God and man, where they now meet"<sup>32</sup>. Thus, the encounter takes on a kenotic form: the true experience of God passes through the cross of Christ, which transforms suffering into a space of communion and human limitation into a place of divine manifestation. This constitutes a mystical dimension of encounter that starts from otherness. Edith Stein described it as knowledge and love becoming one, and the soul discovering itself to be the "dwelling place of God," called to let itself be inhabited and shaped by Him<sup>33</sup>. Christian mysticism, then, is not the heritage of a few, but the ultimate vocation of every believer, because all are destined to participate in the Trinitarian life. Mystical contemplation is not, therefore, foreign to daily life, but is realized in it as incarnate spirituality. In this way, encounter, experience and mysticism are not isolated concepts, but moments of a single dynamism that introduces man into the life of God and transforms his entire existence.

### 3. Pneumatological reading

Now, as regards this concretization of the perichoretic movement of the Trinity towards man, a constant and processual dynamism is given and established. The event of Christ and the fullness of revelation given by Him and in Him have already been completed in history, but "the unceasing action of the Holy Spirit, until its definitive consummation"<sup>34</sup> continues to unfold as a movement of love until the New Creation is established and we can say with Paul that "God is all in all" (1 Cor 15, 28). Revelation, in this sense, is not a closed or static event, but an open event in which the Spirit actualizes and leads to fulfilment what Christ has inaugurated.

This revelatory movement, perpetuated in history through the action of the Spirit, implies that reality, and with it history itself, is read in a pneumatological key, that is, in the light of the Spirit who makes Christ present and communicates him in every age<sup>35</sup>. Yves Congar emphasized that one cannot speak of the Church without speaking of the Spirit, for it is He who transforms history into a place of communion<sup>36</sup>. Pneumatology, therefore, is not an addition to Christology, but its vital extension in the believing community and in creation.

A pneumatological reading also opens an understanding of the experience of God in encounter, since the Spirit leads the believer to the full truth (Jn 16, 13). First, the Holy Spirit is given in the eschatological event of the Son, without measure and to the whole human race (cf. Jn 3, 34). As Karl Rahner observes, God's self-communication in the Spirit is always universal, because the Spirit is the gift in which the Father and the Son give themselves to each other<sup>37</sup>. Secondly, the Spirit gives depth to communion by building up the Body of Christ and making the unity of the saints possible. Piero Coda emphasizes that it is the Spirit who brings the work of the Son to fulfilment, introducing

<sup>31</sup> In this regard, it is worth mentioning the last five stanzas of *the Spiritual Canticle*, where the Saint shows the experience and aspiration of glory, where the process of transformation into the Beloved reaches its peak. Cf. SAN JUAN DE LA CRUZ, *Obras Completas*, Editorial de Espiritualidad, Madrid 2008, CB 36-40.

<sup>32</sup> H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theodrama II...*, 67.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. E. STEIN, *La ciencia de la cruz*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2008, 201-215.

<sup>34</sup> COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *La sinodalidad en la vida...*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. PIE P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología"..., 33.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Y. CONGAR, *Creo en el Espíritu Santo. vol. 1*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1983, 45-47.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad...*, 29-33.

humanity into the dynamism of Trinitarian life<sup>38</sup>. The Spirit also opens us to understanding the meaning of communion in all its depth. Paul expresses this in his prayer for the Ephesians, asking that believers understand “the breadth, length, height and depth” (Eph 3, 18). This is not merely conceptual knowledge, but the experience of being rooted in the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge<sup>39</sup>.

Thus, the action of the Spirit ensures that the movement of the Trinity towards man is not reduced to the past, rather a present experience and anticipation of future fulfilment<sup>40</sup>. In this way, pneumatology is not just a chapter of theology, but a horizon from which to understand time and human existence as a path towards communion.

#### 4. Communion as the fullness of Giving/Surrender

The Holy Spirit can be thought of, in Augustinian terms, as the Love between the Father (Lover) and the Son (Beloved). This perspective, developed in *De Trinitate*, emphasizes that the Spirit is the bond of unity that proceeds from the reciprocal gift of the Father and the Son<sup>41</sup>. If the Spirit is, then, the overflow of that love, it is understood that only in Him is the full Gift/Surrender to which human beings are vocationally called and realized. In this sense, Christian life does not consist solely in outwardly reproducing the works of Christ, but in participating in the same dynamism of love that constitutes the Trinitarian life.

To speak pertinently and sensibly (as far as we are concerned) about God the Trinity, we must look at the growing relationship until we reach the gift between human creatures in Jesus, that is, communion. But also, conversely: in order to responsibly promote that growing relationship until we reach the gift between human creatures in communion, we must turn our gaze to God the Trinity<sup>42</sup>. This double movement, from God to man and from man to God, constitutes the fundamental logic of Christian life. As Piero Coda points out, ecclesial communion is inseparable from Trinitarian communion, because in this man finds his truth and his fulfilment<sup>43</sup>.

Insertion into divine life also implies a new understanding of social relations. The Trinity is not an abstract scheme projected onto society, but the source from which the fabric of reciprocal relations is re-signified<sup>44</sup>. John Zizioulas insisted that the person cannot be conceived in isolation, but as a being-in-communion: the very ontology of the human being is relational<sup>45</sup>. From this perspective, Trinitarian anthropology illuminates social life, showing that personal identity is built on reciprocity and mutual gift-giving.

This dimension also has ecumenical and cultural relevance. Catherine LaCugna proposed reading the Trinity not as speculation about the divine essence, but as a doctrine about the economy of salvation, which manifests what it means to live “for others” in community<sup>46</sup>. Along the same lines, Jürgen Moltmann pointed out that the Trinitarian model, by conceiving of God as a communion of persons, challenges rigid hierarchical forms and opens the possibility of more participatory and supportive social structures<sup>47</sup>.

In short, the Trinity comes into play to redefine the collegial body of reciprocal relationships. In it we find two complementary models of anthropological experience: participation in the Trinitarian life on an individual level, which transforms personal

<sup>38</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 182.

<sup>39</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that it is the Spirit who enables man to enter into these infinite dimensions of Trinitarian love, surpassing any human measure. Cf. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theodrama II...*, 112–115.

<sup>40</sup> B. FORTE, *El Espíritu Santo, memoria y profecía de Jesús*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1998, 65–72.

<sup>41</sup> SAN AGUSTÍN DE HIPONA, “La Trinidad”, en: L. ARIAS (trad.), *Obras completas. Vol. V*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2006, VIII, 10, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. P. CODA, “Trinidad y Antropología” ..., 34.

<sup>43</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 196–200.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. P. CODA, “Trinidad y Antropología II...”, 128.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad...*, 71–77.

<sup>46</sup> C. M. LACUGNA, *Dios para nosotros...*, 53–60.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. J. MOLTANN, *La Trinidad y el Reino*, Sígueme, Salamanca 1983, 208–215.

existence as a temple of the Spirit; and participation in the Trinitarian life on a communal level, which makes the Church, and in a broader sense society, a space of communion. These two levels cannot be dissociated, as they feed into each other: personal experience of the Spirit leads to ecclesial communion, and ecclesial communion sustains and fulfils personal experience.

## 5. Birth, life and mission of the Church

As we have seen above, in this life in/by/towards the Trinity, “the Church, *Ekklesia*, is the result of God's calling in Christ through the Spirit”<sup>48</sup>. With this Trinitarian anchor, it is understood that the birth and life of the Church has its beginning in the Trinity: prefigured in the eternal plan of the Father, constituted by the Paschal work of the Son, and manifested in the perichoretic communion of the Spirit. The Church, therefore, is not a purely sociological reality or a mere historical institution, but the sacrament of divine communion, the visible prolongation of the Trinitarian mystery in time<sup>49</sup>.

From this perspective, the mission of the Church consists in preaching the Gospel, which is Christ himself, *Verbum abbreviatum*, that is, the definitive Word concentrated in the person of the Son<sup>50</sup>. This exercise is inseparable from the dynamic of the Spirit, who guides the Church in every “today” of history. The International Theological Commission has insisted that the Church's mission requires relevance and impact: recognizing the path that God wants for it ‘today’, without sterile retreats into the past and without utopian flights forward<sup>51</sup>.

What is required, therefore, is a movement that, starting from the Eucharist, tenses the threads of history. The Church makes present, in the Eucharistic celebration, the past sacrifice of Christ, but as a living memorial that anticipates future fulfilment and links us, all human beings, in divine relationality. Joseph Ratzinger pointed out that the Eucharist is to make present the past sacrifice that is the pledge of the eschatological promise<sup>52</sup>. It is the place where Trinitarian communion becomes tangible, and from where the Church's mission in the world is shaped. In this horizon, ecclesiology and the Eucharist are inseparable: the Church is born of the Eucharist and, at the same time, celebrates the Eucharist as the supreme expression of its identity<sup>53</sup>.

In this way, the mission of the Church is understood as an extension of the perichoretic movement of the Trinity: the Father who sends, the Son who gives himself, the Spirit who gathers. To evangelize, then, is to introduce people into this communion; to discern is to allow oneself to be guided by the Spirit in this dynamism; to celebrate is to sacramentally actualize the gift of Christ that anticipates the definitive Kingdom. All of this configures the Church as a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race.

## 6. Virtuous circle: Trinity-anthropology, Perichoresis-Reciprocity

A virtuous circle between the mystery of God and the mystery of man has gradually taken shape. In the light of the Trinity, we can understand what it means to be human; and, reciprocally, human beings express, vocationally, the life within the Trinity. This dynamism constitutes a fundamental hermeneutical key: God reveals himself as communion, and the human being can only understand himself to the extent that he

<sup>48</sup> Cf. P. CODA, “Trinidad y Antropología...”, 27.

<sup>49</sup> CONCILIO VATICANO II, *Constitución dogmática Lumen Gentium, sobre la Iglesia*, Editrice Vaticana, Roma 1964, 1-2.

<sup>50</sup> H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Gloria II: Estilos laicales*, Encuentro, Madrid 1986, 135.

<sup>51</sup> COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *La sinodalidad en la vida...*, 56; P. CODA, “Trinidad y Antropología...”, 38.

<sup>52</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Teología de la liturgia*, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2011, 46-48.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. H. DE LUBAC, *Meditación sobre la Iglesia*, Encuentro, Madrid 2003, 85-92.

participates in that communion<sup>54</sup>.

This implies a long and not always easy process of theological, kenotic, and perichoretic maturation, which requires Christian thought to delve into an ontology capable of articulating the divine and the human without confusing or separating them<sup>55</sup>. In this vein, what we call relational ontology or communion ontology consists in understanding the human being not as an isolated substance, but as a being-in-relation, constituted by and for communion, by and for the other/Other. Zizioulas has strongly developed this idea by pointing out that the person is precisely the ontological category that allows us to think of man in continuity with the Trinitarian mystery<sup>56</sup>.

In short, it is a matter of welcoming and expressing “a thought that is always open and always new, and in a just and supportive praxis, the Trinitarian rhythm of God’s event in human history”<sup>57</sup>. Contemporary theology thus seeks to overcome the individualistic and self-sufficient paradigm, to affirm that the truth of man is not found in himself, but in his constitutive openness to the Other and to others. The guarantee of the effectiveness of this “virtuous circle” is the incarnation of the Word, in which the reciprocity between the human and the divine is manifested<sup>58</sup>. Christ, our Lord, is therefore the perfect synthesis in whom the human reaches its maximum splendor and the divine is revealed with a human face<sup>59</sup>.

This affirmation of faith implies that in Jesus, God affirms who man is for Him. But at the same time, it implies that all men, and ultimately the cosmos, are called in Him to be, in fullness and truth, what they are destined to be: the created expression of God. Joseph Ratzinger expressed this by saying that man does not find his truth in self-sufficiency, but in being a “living symbol” of God in the world<sup>60</sup>. In Christ, then, the universal horizon of the human vocation opens: to live as an expression and transparency of Trinitarian communion.

## 7. Anthropology, Trinity and Spirituality

As mentioned above, the anthropological experience in a Trinitarian key can be unfolded in at least two paradigms of relationality: the *inhabitatio*, represented by St Augustine of Hippo and St John of the Cross, with Love as the guiding concept; and, on the other hand, what we have called *cohabitatio*, represented spiritually by the experience of Chiara Lubich, with Communion as the central category. None of these models of anthropological experience overlaps, nor does one have primacy over the other. Finally, Coda brings together three conditions that can constitute the keys to an integrated paradigm, which we call here *coinhabitatio*.

### 7.1. *Inhabitation / Love*

Augustine<sup>61</sup> was the first to strongly formulate the circularity between the Trinity and the inner experience of love. In *De Trinitate*, he emphasized that God is “more intimate than my most intimate self and higher than my highest self,” so that indwelling is not a metaphor but an expression of the real presence of the Trinity in the soul. In this perspective, relationality is not understood as an addition to human existence, but as its deepest constitution. This intuition gave way, in the maturing of the tradition, to what

<sup>54</sup> Along the same lines, St Augustine explains how the deepest identity of human beings is discovered in divine life. Cf. SAN AGUSTÍN DE HIPONA, “La Trinidad” ..., XIV, 11, 15.

<sup>55</sup> It is worth considering Rahner’s idea: all Christian anthropology should ultimately be Christology, since man can only be understood from the God who has communicated himself in Jesus. Cf. K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad*..., 21–25.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad*..., 45–63.

<sup>57</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad*..., 203.

<sup>58</sup> This is how the Church understood it and formulated it dogmatically at the Council of Chalcedon. Cf. DH 301–302.

<sup>59</sup> Along these lines, Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasised that the face of Christ simultaneously reveals the form of God and the form of man, thus constituting the key to all theological anthropology. H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Theodrama II*..., 41–59.

<sup>60</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Introducción al cristianismo*..., 209–213.

<sup>61</sup> SAN AGUSTÍN DE HIPONA, “La Trinidad” ..., VIII, 10, 14.

would later be expressed in Spanish mysticism with the metaphor of the “inner castle,” developed by Teresa of Jesus, and to the theology of transformative union in St John of the Cross.

The risk of a certain dualism, an apparent disdain for the flesh, has already been pointed out in the critical reading of some modern interpreters. However, the tradition overcame this tension thanks to the radical *kenosis* of the Incarnate Word (*ensarkómenos*), who promised the real, living and effective presence of his body and blood<sup>62</sup>. Thus, in this paradigm, God dwells in the self of the soul as a free gift, and this indwelling produces communion with others<sup>63</sup>.

## 7.2. *Cohabitatio / Communio*

Chiara Lubich, from her charismatic experience, proposes a complementary paradigm. For her, the key lies in contemplating God's presence in all brothers and sisters: “the communication of the God in me with the God in my brother. And if the two Heavens meet, there is only one Trinity, where the two are as Father and Son and between them is the Holy Spirit”<sup>64</sup>. Here, relationality unfolds as a movement towards the other, in a kind of “outer castle” that is built on the recognition of God's indwelling in our brothers and sisters.

This paradigm highlights the communal dimension of the Christian experience. It is not only about the silent union of the soul with God, but also about the opening of the word and of life towards others. As Piero Coda observes, in Lubich's spirituality, the Trinity manifests itself not so much in interiority as in the concrete reciprocity that generates visible communion<sup>65</sup>. This emphasis has ecclesiological and social consequences: the experience of God becomes a principle of unity, reconciliation and dialogue in the midst of diversity.

## 7.3. *Coinhabitatio / Integrated Proposal*

According to Coda, a meaningful Trinitarian experience requires three fundamental anthropological conditions: intentionality, corporeality and reciprocity<sup>66</sup>. *Intentionality* indicates that both the Trinity of salvation and man are open to the mystery of the Other. *Corporeality* points out that the flesh, far from being an obstacle, is a privileged mediation of the relationship with God and with others. And *reciprocity* expresses the fullness of relationality in the third, that is, in mutual recognition that transcends the simple face-to-face encounter.

Expanding on these conditions allows us to better appreciate their depth. Intentionality has its roots in Rahner's anthropology, which understood man as a “hearer of the Word” constitutively open to God's self-communication<sup>67</sup>. Corporeality can be brought into dialogue with Edith Stein, who emphasized the importance of the body as an indispensable mediation of spiritual and communal life<sup>68</sup>. Finally, reciprocity finds resonance in Zizioulas, for whom personal existence is only fully realized as communion open to a third party<sup>69</sup>.

In this way, *coinhabitatio* is not presented as a substitution for the paradigms presented above, but as a synthesis. Its horizon is a communal paradigm that combines

<sup>62</sup> Cf. K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad...*, 29–31.

<sup>63</sup> “It is a great joy for the soul to understand that God never leaves the soul, even if it is in mortal sin... What more do you want, O soul, and what more do you seek outside yourself, since within yourself you have your riches, your delights, your satisfaction, your fulfilment and your kingdom, which is your Beloved, whom your soul desires and seeks?” SAN JUAN DE LA CRUZ, *Obras Completas...*, CB 1,8. Edith Stein understood this in the same way, as a participation in the Trinitarian life that can never be purely individual, because it always opens up to communion. Cf. E. STEIN, *La ciencia de la cruz...*, 201–215.

<sup>64</sup> CH. LUBICH, *La unidad y Jesús abandonado*, Ciudad Nueva, Madrid 2001, 73.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 245–250.

<sup>66</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 252–257.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. K. RAHNER, *La Trinidad...*, 21–25.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. E. STEIN, *Ser finito y ser eterno*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos 2002, 431–440.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. J. D. ZIZIOULAS, *Comunión y alteridad...*, 71–77.

interiority and exteriority, silence and speech, mysticism and praxis, individual and communal. Thus, anthropology in a Trinitarian key finds a more complete way of expressing man's vocation to be the 'living image of the Trinity' in all its dimensions.

## 8. The articulating and conclusive axis: the Eucharist

In the same way that in Christ we find the assurance of a virtuous circle between the divine and the human, we also find the guarantee of communion among creatures, because all creation tends towards Him in terms of its consummation. "Therefore, it is necessary to pass through the flesh of Christ crucified and risen and to participate in the Eucharist"<sup>70</sup>. In this sacrament, God himself comes to meet man, inviting him to enter into relationship with Him through an act of bodily and existential communion. Eucharistic participation is therefore not an isolated symbolic gesture, but the sacramental actualization of the gift of the Son, which configures the believer in his own kenotic form.

The Eucharist reveals the truth of relational anthropology: man is made for communion. There, God gives himself to us in Christ under the sensible species of bread and wine, and in that gesture, he calls us to an erotic-agapic relationship that integrates human desire with divine love. "The Eucharist builds up the Church as communion"<sup>71</sup>, that is, the act of receiving the Body of Christ does not end in interiority, but generates community, bond, responsibility towards others. In this horizon, we can understand Coda's statement: "God comes to seek me in the encounter between my flesh and the flesh of the other, unpredictable and contingent on the situation that affects me, in the *kairos* of every moment of existence"<sup>72</sup>.

This Eucharistic dynamism founds what we might call a culture of tenderness, in which all causal logic of domination is broken and the space of reciprocity is opened: "to touch means to be touched and to allow oneself to be touched; to recognize is to be recognized and to allow oneself to be recognized; to say is to be said and to allow oneself to be said"<sup>73</sup>. Here the deepest truth of a communal anthropology: man can only be understood in living relationship, in shared vulnerability that is transformed into mutual self-giving. Edith Stein had intuited this dimension when she affirmed that the person is only known in the "act of giving and receiving"<sup>74</sup>, which reaches its supreme expression in the Eucharist.

Consequently, Eucharistic participation implies an act of faith: abandoning the securities of the self in order to open oneself to the other/Other and welcome the newness of communion. It is a gesture of complete trust in the transforming action of the Trinity, which continually renews history. The Eucharist is not a static repetition, but an event in which Christ, as the "living way" (cf. Heb 10, 20), becomes food and, at the same time, the guide of the human pilgrimage towards fulfilment. Joseph Ratzinger expressed it forcefully: "to live from Him in order to live like Him, so that He may live in us. And so that God's love may pass through us"<sup>75</sup>.

In this sense, the Eucharist is not reduced to a liturgical rite, but is the articulating axis of a communal anthropology. In it, the Trinity becomes present in time, anticipating the eschatological banquet where God will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15, 28). By receiving the Body of Christ, the believer becomes a body of communion; by drinking from the cup, he or she is integrated into the perichoretic dynamic of divine love. This is the ultimate reason why theological anthropology can only be understood from the Eucharist:

<sup>70</sup> P. CODA, "Trinidad y Antropología II" ..., 146.

<sup>71</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2003, 21.

<sup>72</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 318.

<sup>73</sup> P. CODA, *Desde la Trinidad...*, 325.

<sup>74</sup> E. STEIN, *Ser finito y ser eterno...*, 443.

<sup>75</sup> J. RATZINGER, *Introducción al cristianismo...*, 213.

because there the vocation of man to be gift and communion, the living expression of the triune God in history, is fully realized.

## Exordium

An image that can best articulate what we have worked on so far is the allegorical *parable* of the vine, the vinedresser, and the branches (Jn 15). The authentic and true vine is the Son; the one who bears witness to the Son in favor of the truthfulness of that vine is the Father, the vine-dresser, who cares for and cleanses it; and finally, every believer, the branches, who lives immersed in the vegetal image proposed by the Gospel of John. Jesus is the Old Testament vineyard. In him, the Father has seen the good fruit that did not sprout in Israel. However, Jesus gathers Israel itself into himself, and in Israel all believers, all those who, as the prologue points out (Jn 1, 12), bring to fulfilment the capacity to become children (*tekna*) of God, through the Son (*uios*), the authentic vine: “for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15, 5).

The Trinitarian event in this image is therefore evident: the Father, in his silent action, cares for and cleanses the branches in pursuit of the life of his vine, with the effective aim of bearing fruit. The Son is the trunk that gathers in himself every believer, the other, the neighbor, who can only bear fruit in him, as long as he remains in him, as a constitutive attitude of the branch, of the believer, of the child of God. Now, the action of the Spirit is not literally evident in the text, at least in this pericope, although the Paraclete appears in the following chapter; nevertheless, we bring up the timely contribution of Cyril of Alexandria, who highlights the pneumatological intuition underlying the image of the vine, the vinedresser and the branches, the *Ruah* as the generator of life, linking the parts in a close thread of love

“If the branch does not have the sap that gives it life from the vine, as from a mother, how could it produce grapes or what fruit would it bear and from where? Indeed, no fruit of virtue will germinate in us if we have separated ourselves from union with Christ. Those who are prepared by the one who can satisfy us and nourish us in piety, with the guidance and grace of the Spirit, as with life-giving water, will find it easy to bear fruit”<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> CIRILO DE ALEJANDRÍA, “Comentario al Evangelio de Juan”, en: T. ODEN (ed.), *La Biblia comentada por los Padres de la Iglesia*, Ciudad Nueva - Madrid 2013, 10. 2.

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