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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE FROM OUR EXPERIENCE OF GOD

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Abstract

Already in 1965, Pope Paul VI had drawn up a living itinerary for interreligious encounters, in which the Church's responsible testimony begins by recognizing "with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."¹ My experience in meeting devoted persons — whether Hindu, Buddhist, Jew, Muslim or Christian — has taught me that experience of God's presence is, indeed, universal. Sharing personal challenges and aspirations toward mystical union with the Absolute has always impressed me with deep peace, inner hope, awareness of the need for purification, and an enlightened view toward the future.

It is simple to converse about the experience of self-denial, with uniquely concrete and sincere lessons (for example, the response of a

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¹*Nostra Aetate*, 2.

venerable Brahman to my request for his prayer: “Woe to me if I ever prayed for myself. I would ruin everything!”), with the experience of inner peace received as immediate response to one’s efforts toward inner attitudinal sacrifice. How can we explain this?² Fernando Rielo’s *Mystical Anthropology* elevates Teresian mysticism to science, thus allowing us to understand how interreligious dialogue can forge very fertile breakthroughs by sharing personal experience about one’s “Interior Castle,” “Dark Night,” or “Living Flame of Love.”

1. Personal Experience in Interreligious Dialogue

Across the years, I have met so many sincere and hard-working persons of different religions. I have understood that the histories of worldwide religious beliefs and practices are very different, as also their respective metaphysical background assumptions. My experience has brought me to recognize three perspectives for studying world religions.

1.1. Belief Systems: Theoretical research — study of doctrines, history of their development, founder’s biography and historical settings, the distinction of the monotheistic religions as descendents of Abraham,³ geographical expansion of religion, reality-explanations (cosmos, humanity, future and last things).

1.2. Social Manifestations: Moral codes and religious customs, liturgical practices — social manifestations (for all ages: rites of initiation, naming, puberty, marriage, healing, defense, aging, dying), hierarchy of authorities, popular feasts, etc.

1.3. Religious experience: Degrees of union with God, ascetical practices, purification rites and experiences (external and internal), transformations of soul, personal encounters and dialogue with God (the Absolute Subject, name Him as they will).

I have also recognized the fact that we meet persons (not religions); they were born into their religion just as I was, and like myself, they probably do not fully understand everything they believe, or even the moral codes and customs they must follow.

²Theologically, Paul VI explained it thus: “[The Church] proclaims, and ever must proclaim *Christ* “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), *in whom* men may find *the fullness of religious life*, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself” (NA, 2). Philosophically, the scientific task remains for the explanation of the real happening of this mystical union with God on both the universal and the specific fullness levels, and of the difference between them.

³NA, 3 and 4.

I have found that if our conversation touched upon our different creeds, we could never really find any common ground upon which to share our experiences. To the contrary we found many discrepancies that separated us, and for friendship's sake, we opted for speaking about other topics.

I have also experienced conversations that focused on popular religious practices, and realized afterward that we spent a great deal of time on trivial comparisons and contrasts; somewhat more of a custom-curiosity encounter.

But when we began with friendship, honoring each other, we shared our personal experience of God, and we learned so much from each other. Indeed, we felt blessed.

We had left aside our intellectually expressible differences, to speak with each other about our real experiences of the "Divine" or Absolute (whom some of us call "God"), and we simply spoke about our experience of self-denial (ascetical effort) and, as response to our action, of the surging from within of peace, joy and love. We could also speak about the lessons of virtue which we have observed or contemplated — sometimes the Hindus referring to their reading of Christ's words in the Gospels, and sometimes the Christians speaking of their understanding of Hindu writings. And we could also share our experiences of the purifications of the soul, such as dryness or emptiness... It was possible to do this, much like children share about their important steps in life, and it was never better understood that we were speaking as children of the one and the same Heavenly Father (whom we all call by different names). We had the extraordinary experience of the reality that we are brothers and sisters because we are human beings, in essential relationship with the one and only Absolute. We accepted each other as we are, without any interest in convincing or persuading about being right, rather just celebrating the sacred exchange of personal experiences.

I find it helpful, for his simple and direct expression, to tap Mohandas K. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* for some examples of ascetical life, as well as mystical union on the *deificans* level,⁴ as he begins his autobiography with this simple affirmation:

But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself,... If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise. They can only add to my

⁴This was already elaborated in my article "Evangelization, Spirituality and Globalization," *Asian Horizons* 5, 4 (December 2011) 724-734.

humility. The more I reflect and look back on the past, the more vividly do I feel my limitations... What I want to achieve, — what I have been striving and pining to achieve these thirty years — is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain Moksha.

There are some things which are known only to oneself and one's Maker. These are clearly incommunicable. The experiments I am about to relate are not such. But they are spiritual or rather moral; for the essence of religion is morality.

This truth is not only truthfulness in word, but truthfulness in thought also, and not only the relative truth of our conception, but the Absolute Truth, the Eternal Principle, that is God... But I worship God as Truth only. I have not yet found Him, but I am seeking after Him. I am prepared to sacrifice the things dearest to me in pursuit of this quest.

Though this path is strait and narrow and sharp as the razor's edge, for me it has been the quickest and easiest... Often in my progress I have had faint glimpses of the Absolute Truth, God, and daily the conviction is growing upon me that He alone is real and all else is unreal.⁵

Gandhi refers to the personal effort of choosing goodness to be in communion with Truth (as he identifies the Absolute). This "ascetical" effort is admittedly only a part of his experience. This "incommunicable communication" corresponds to aspects of the "mystical" life, whether in purification or certain experiences of union with God, and in all dimensions of our being. Gandhi is acutely conscious of his goal for achieving what he calls "self-realization" or "seeing God face-to-face." This is authentic devotion,⁶ and it expresses changes (in mind, will and action) in ways of communicating to others, and receiving from God peace, joy, fulfilment, love, wisdom, fortitude and piety. We find ourselves speaking of being "changed

⁵Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, <http://ebookweb.in/Ebooks/load/English/Biographies/Mohandas%20Karamchand%20Gandhi%28Mahatma%20Gandhi%29.pdf>, 2-3.

⁶We find similarities in Prof. Kojiro Nakamura's study of Islamic and Buddhist experience of devotion: "Although the merit of *nembutsu* is infinitely great, [and] presupposes faith... now faith consists of three factors, called the 'three hearts': 'a most sincere heart', 'a deep-believing heart', and 'a longing heart'... 'a most sincere heart': a heart true to the full, a heart which in every act of the body, in every word of the mouth and every thought of the mind, is true. It is sincerity and single-heartedness in all one's inner and outer acts... 'a deep-believing heart': a heart which truly recognizes human's moral incapacity, sinfulness and unworthiness of salvation in this age of decadence... a heart which has unshakable trust in the saving power and compassion of Amida Buddha... to face human's existential situation of total hopelessness, and yet, to have sincere hope of salvation through the gracious power of Amida Buddha... 'a longing heart' is the sincere aspiration which prays for birth into the Pure Land..." [*Ghazali and Prayer*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2001, 90-91].

persons," in a process of changing and a reverence of God and neighbour that requires constancy in virtue and love. We can share our unique experiences of what can be common to us all, regardless of our religious creed.

Ascetical experience is clearly recognized in all religions: outward ascetical action, like fasting, abstinence, and the like, and inward ascetical effort, such as self-denial of the ego and its pride, anger, jealousy, gluttony, lust, etc. All these efforts to surpass our potentially negative tendencies (acknowledging an imbalance in human nature, or "concupiscences") are similar life-choices that are prescribed across the world religions. Devoted individuals understand that by sacrificing self-gratification or self-preservation from sufferings, their goal is to reach enduring mystical or spiritual union with the Absolute (only some recognize the Absolute as being a Personal Subject).

In this way, we easily perceive human nature to be *Capax Dei*, and we can share our ascetical and our mystical experiences upon resolving negative, useless, obsessive thoughts and feelings, and reaching certain degrees of union with God during this earthly pilgrimage. As friends, on the *deificans* level, i.e., *Capax Dei*, we can share about what is most essential to us, i.e., our experience of eternal life while here on earth. But it remains indeed puzzling why it is so difficult to explain *how* this can happen, and *what*, in fact, does happen in the *mutations* of the soul produced by the action of God in us and with us.⁷

2. Rielian Mystical Anthropology Raises Teresian Spirituality to Science

Fernando Rielo's *Mystical Anthropology*⁸ is, indeed, a timely development that raises St Theresa of Avila's spirituality to the level of a science. In his *Leyendas*, Rielo speaks of this reality in his own life experience:

... I had the verbal impression received from St. Theresa who exceedingly asked me to be concerned with her mystical revelation. Her exact words were: "Save my mysticism!"

⁷Baptism has a clear ontological effect with its sanctifying grace and filial character that upgrades human nature's *Capax Dei* to *Capax Trinitatis*, i.e., to use Pope Paul VI's terms "[it is] in Christ... in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself." But due to the limits of this article, I will develop herein more about the former, leaving the latter to future articles.

⁸Fernando Rielo, *Concepción Mística de Antropología*, Madrid: Fundación Fernando Rielo, 2013.

I saw in opened heavens the ontological magnitude that dilated the mystical *transverberation* toward horizons that knew no dusk. I say “transverberation” referring in this case to the blessed dart that, penetrating fire, consumes all the love possible in this world, in definitive betrothal with the Friend and Beloved. [...]

This legend occurred in the same year as the feast-day theophany [narrated in Legend LXV (65), May 30, 1964], and I did not forget St. Theresa’s *transverberation*, raising it to pure metaphysics and ontology, to define the divine essence of the Most Holy Trinity; the essence of the human person is image and replica of it. This mystical *transverberation* is what makes us image and replica of God.⁹

To understand Rielo’s Mystical Ontology or Anthropology opens the way to understanding “how” this experience of interreligious dialogue can be possible; how we can understand each other’s real experience of God in our soul and spirit, and the mutations caused within our soul and our spirit by the freely given action of God within us, and our collaboration with Him. Perhaps the simplest entrance into Rielo’s explanation is to recognize that the “tripartite constitution” of the human person forms part of Sacred Tradition. St Gregory Nazianzus, for example, affirmed that: “to redeem man in the totality of his body, soul and spirit, Christ assumed all the elements of human nature, otherwise man would not have been saved.”¹⁰ Here we have reference to the tripartite understanding of human nature, implied in the *Capax Dei* anthropological affirmation, that returns to the Scriptural statement of St Paul in 1 Thes 5:23.¹¹

Assimilating contemporary scientific knowledge, Fernando Rielo’s Mystical Anthropology provides a cogent explanation of the *Capax Dei* of our personhood, i.e., the “image and likeness” in our created psychosomatized spirit:

The formal structure of human nature, presupposing the Divine Constitutive Presence, involves a psychosomatized spirit — i.e., the unity of three entities — spirit, psyche, and body — wherein the spirit, indwelt

⁹Fernando Rielo, *Leyendas de Amor*, Madrid: Fundación Fernando Rielo, 2010, 163-164.

¹⁰Pope Benedict XVI said that this 4th century Doctor of the Church gave great prominence to Christ’s full humanity for the redemption of the whole human person... Having become a man, Christ gave us the possibility of becoming, in turn, like him. Nazianzus exhorted people: “Let us seek to be like Christ, because Christ also became like us: to become gods through him since he himself, through us, became a man. He took the worst upon himself to make us a gift of the best” (*Orationes* 1, 5: SC 247, 78). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2007/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20070822_en.html

¹¹The distinction between “soul” and “spirit” is also affirmed in Heb 4:12.

by the constitutive presence of the Divine Persons, is the seat of the self, which, with its *potestas*, ontologically takes up the complexity of the psyche, with its somatic completion. The human spirit is created at the very moment of conception. The psychobiological dynamisms partly inherited from the hominid precedent are included in this psychosomatization and thus underlie hereditary traits.¹²

The psychosomatized spirit as created (although diversely: our spirit directly, our psycho-soma provided through our parents), is indwelled by the uncreated Divine Constitutive Presence that makes us human persons. Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI stated: "To speak of man and his aspiration to the infinite means to recognize his constitutive relation with the Creator... *to define his identity in an essential way: a relational identity whose primary fact is original and ontological dependence upon the One who has wanted us and created us.*"¹³

The tripartite anthropological constitution does not declare the existence of three distinct entities, but rather that these three are assumed in an orderly way, each's energies and functions assumed by the higher form, until the spirit, created personally by God, and infused with His Divine Constitutive Presence, in the living zygote in the maternal womb, at the very moment of conception. This recognizes the action of God in creating each human being singularly. This "orderly way" can be expressed thus: The bodily organs with their apparatus and systems, the internal and external senses, the stimuli and reflexes, the instincts and pulsions are assumed by the soul with its multiple energies of its faculties in the zygote: mind, will and free action, all in turn, assumed by the created spirit bringing about our self with our conscience for judgment over good and evil, reflecting into our intentions and attitudes regarding daily behaviour-choices, and finally the indwelling uncreated Divine Constitutive Presence, who indeed constitutes us as persons in dialogue, both listening and speaking, empowering us with a filial consciousness.

What phenomenology of religion descriptively termed "*homo religiosus*" is further elucidated as *homo mysticus*¹⁴ that defines us as unique created children of the Father, superior to all other animal life. So far, we are describing the state of being of the human person: the

¹²Fernando Rielo, *The Genetic Model in my Thought*, Madrid: Fernando Rielo Foundation, 1991, transl. David G. Murray, 118-119.

¹³ http://www.osservatoreromano.va/orportal-portlets_portal/detail/binaries/pdf_quotidiano/quotidiano.pdf (August 10, 2012).

¹⁴Jose Maria Lopez Sevillano, "Introduction" to Fernando Rielo, *The Genetic Model in my Thought*, 37.

structure and functions of the entities within that structure. This is termed *mystica essendi*.

Our experiential evidence of our personhood in substantial relationship with God is visible in our inner drive for perfection, to be-more: our mind innately opts for belief and tends to look for truth; our will expects and wants goodness; our free-action aspires to love, and affirms beauty. We intuit our life's meaning and fulfilment; beyond what we can see, we dream.

The "Law of Perfectibility" dynamizes the action -the fruit- of each person's free choice. Thus the "spiritual journey," described by Gandhi (and every other devoted person of all religious creeds), requires a conscious determination as to the direction in which each person wants to go. When the direction is freely chosen toward the highest goal, then a process of dialogical transformation begins, and this is *mystica operandi*.¹⁵

One could ask why human perfectibility's goal is not innately fixed. Our human nature, constituted *Capax Dei* or *deificans*, is experientially wounded, and its interior disorder is the result of Original Sin. Devoted ascetical effort reveals the hardness of heart that we all experience. However, the understanding of Original Sin must be re-dimensioned: the sin-reality in the Genesis revelation is not "marks" or "filth" on an otherwise unblemished, autonomous, soul, "given" thereafter by God to each and every human being, thus resulting in having to be removed or erased from our being by some supernatural action.¹⁶ It is really not a stain or blemish at all, just as the created person is not, nor ever has been "autonomous" (i.e., ontologically separate from God). Rather, the human person is

¹⁵Rose B. Calabretta, "Evangelization, Spirituality and Globalization," 727-728.

¹⁶Very interestingly enough, this was noted carefully by Gandhi: "...one of the Plymouth Brethren, a Christian sect, confronted me with an argument for which I was not prepared: '...Sin we must. It is impossible to live in this world sinless. And therefore Jesus suffered and atoned for all the sins of mankind. Only he who accepts His great redemption can have eternal peace. Think what a life of restlessness is yours, and what a promise of peace we have.' The argument utterly failed to convince me. I humbly replied: 'If this be the Christianity acknowledged by all Christians, I cannot accept it. I do not seek redemption from the consequences of my sin. I seek to be redeemed from sin itself, or rather from the very thought of sin. Until I have attained that end, I shall be content to be restless.' Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 79. [Gandhi's uncompromising demand for redemption aims at an inexpressible essential regeneration; with such transparent sensitivity, he affirms his expectation for what Catholic baptism brings about: being a new person in Christ.]

theanthropic. Original Sin means that sanctifying grace is not given to us by nature. However, our “image and likeness to God” together with the personal, freely chosen effort to opt for truth, goodness and beauty, bring us to the universally recognized ascetical effort that is required of us in “straightening out” and “directing” our behaviour-patterns, our attitudes and our intentions toward participation in Divine Love¹⁷. When we follow the light of our conscience (Jn 3:19-21), even in this constitutive, *deificans* level, we receive God’s response to our vital dialogue, in both the general purification of our passions and a certain level of purification of our soul’s faculties towards transfigurative mystical union with Him, which implies also experiences of contemplation, fruition and ecstasy.

Returning to our wounded condition of Original Sin, we can all recognize that our fallen nature is inadequate in our real relationship with God, i.e., we experience that we are caught in a state of “injustice” in our relationship with our Heavenly Father, evidenced in our submission to acting according to our vices (Rm7:14-20).

Gandhi referred to his experience as husband, with the victory of virtue, as the result of having understood:

The canker of suspicion was rooted out only when I understood *Ahimsa*¹⁸ in all its bearings. I saw then the glory of *Brahmacharya*,¹⁹ and realized that the wife is not the husband’s bondslave, but his companion and his helpmate, and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrow — as free as the husband to choose her own path.²⁰

Another explanation about his victory over vice leads us to perceive Gandhi’s sensitivity not only to the difference between evil and good, and his need to freely choose good action for his purification, but also to the response of God to his purity of heart:

¹⁷Gandhi expresses his concerns about union with God: “My difficulties lay deeper. It was more than I could believe, that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God and that only he who believed in Him would have everlasting life. If God could have sons, all of us were his sons. If Jesus was like God, or God Himself, then all men were like God and could be God Himself.” Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 86 . [Gandhi’s demands call to mind Jesus’ words in Jn 10:34 “Isn’t it written in your law, ‘you are gods’”, and the evangelist’s affirmation in Jn1:12, “For all who received him, to those who believe in his name, he gave them the power to become children of God.” And we follow Christ who is the Way to the Father, to reach the fullness of this divine filiation.]

¹⁸*Ahimsa*’ means literally not-hurting, non-violence.

¹⁹*Brahmacharaya*’ means literally conduct that leads to God. Its technical meaning is self-restraint, particularly mastery over the sexual organ.

²⁰Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 18.

In this case I stole a bit of gold... But this became more than I could bear. I resolved never to steal again. I also made up my mind to confess it to my father... I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. But I felt that the risk should be taken; that there could not be a cleansing without a confession.

I decided at last to write out the confession, to submit it to my father, and ask his forgiveness. I wrote it on a slip of paper and handed it to him myself. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I asked adequate punishment for it, and closed with a request to him not to punish himself for my offence. I also pledged myself never to steal in future.

He read it through, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. For a moment he closed his eyes in thought and then tore up the note. He had sat up to read it. He again lay down. I also cried. I could see my father's agony... Those pearl-drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. Only he who has experienced such love can know what it is. As the hymn says:

'Only he
Who is smitten with the arrows of love,
Knows its power.'

This was, for me, an object-lesson in *Ahimsa*. Then I could read in it nothing more than a father's love, but today I know that it was pure *Ahimsa*. When such *Ahimsa* becomes all-embracing, it transforms everything it touches. There is no limit to its power...

A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance. I know that my confession made my father feel absolutely safe about me, and increased his affection for me beyond measure.²¹

Gandhi is concerned with communicating his experience, without venturing into attempting explanations of what was happening within him, or why it was happening that way. All of us, perhaps of quite different faiths, can identify in many ways with his essential experience of Truth, of transparency before God and man. What is also striking is his need of confession, perfect contrition, and, detesting his sin, firm resolve to change his behaviour.

However, it appears that the Catholic mystics explain the inner dynamic within the human struggle for authentic living and mystical union with God. Jesus, our Master, tells us there is a certain degree of opening up of a relationship with Satan, the anti-truth who hates God and instigates humans to malice and aimless living (Jn8:31-45). Jesus

²¹Mohandas K. Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 19-20.

says to “watch and pray so as not to fall into temptation,” making us look more deeply to avoid even the occasion of sin (Mt 26:41). St John Paul II speaks directly about this in his encyclical on the Holy Spirit, *Dominum et Vivificantem*: “Man’s disobedience always means a turning away from God, and in a certain sense the closing up of human freedom in his regard. It also means a certain opening of this freedom — of the human mind and will — to the one who is the “father of lies.”²² Our relationships are injured by pride and the malice of life (1 Jn 2:15-16). Our nature experiences the complications that stem from “following two masters,” in all our interpersonal relationships, and our actions with nature and with things in this world.

3. A Deeper Encounter with Truth

Beyond the universal experience of *Capax Dei*²³ is the perception that the Absolute Subject is Holy Trinity. Baptism raises our *Capax Dei* to *Capax Trinitatis*; the Divine Constitutive Presence is raised to Sanctifying Presence, allowing us entry into the deeper dimension of self, and opening the way to the personal unction of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the deepest degrees of contemplative union.²⁴ Baptism opens the inner door to capacity for passing from the *deificans* to the *transverberans* level of mystical union with God. St John of the Cross calls this “substantial transformation”;²⁵ Fernando Rielo — using St Theresa of Avila’s experiential terms — calls it “transverberative union”; and both elucidate St Paul’s affirmation: I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20).

St Irenaeus explains that “from the beginning even to the end, God forms us and prepares us for life, and is present with His handiwork,

²² Here we find ourselves at the very centre of what could be called the “anti-Word,” that is to say the “anti-truth”...Who can completely “convince concerning sin,” or concerning this motivation of man’s original disobedience, except the one who alone is the gift and the source of all giving of gifts, except the Spirit, who “searches the depths of God” and is the love of the Father and the Son? (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 37).

²³in which the devout person is attracted to the Absolute, and at the same time, so very conscious of our need to purify ourselves in order to be worthy to be in His presence.

²⁴Using St Theresa’s metaphor of the Interior Castle as reference, it is simple to grasp that in our *Capax Dei*, the unbaptized without sanctifying grace, we have access to only the first 4 mansions during this earthly life.

²⁵St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Divine Love*, No. 21: “Although that which the soul tastes in this touch of God is not perfect, it does in fact have a certain savour of eternal life. And this is not incredible if we believe, as we should, that this is a touch of substances, that is, of the substance of God in the substance of the soul. Many saints have attained to this substantial touch during their lives on earth.”

and perfects it after His image and likeness." And the Incarnate Son, our true Image, "re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word... by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become precious to the Father."²⁶ Fernando Rielo's *Mystical Anthropology*, also referring to Jn 10:34, explains that the universal call to holiness — universal imperative of Jesus for our relation with our Heavenly Father (Mt 5:48) — implies the ascetical-mystical life, which is meant to begin in our earthly lives.

It is in *Gaudium et Spes* that we see how essentially Jesus Christ's Redeeming Act pulls all human beings toward Him, just as He said in Jn 12:32.

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for *all men* of *good* will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the *ultimate vocation* of man is in fact *one, and divine*, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God²⁷ offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery (GS, 22).

Christ's Redeeming Act is vital for each, and every, human being. The living singular reality requires an encounter with this Jesus of Nazareth "whom we crucified, and who rose from the dead" (Acts 2:22-24). It first occurs in the Baptismal character. But for the fullness of our authentic action of love (and this may occur before receiving sacramental Baptism), it is the event of conversion, what St John Paul II calls the *metanoia*.²⁸ "Through just such a conversion in the Holy Spirit a person becomes open to forgiveness, to the remission of sins... For in this sacrifice "the blood of Christ... purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14).

Of course, the universality of Christ's Redeeming Act implies a prior universal "primary" grace, i.e., the "image and likeness" of God as constitutive, *deificans* relationship with Him, with our ultimate finality of mystical union with God as He is. The experiential limit of *Capax Dei* potential for *deificans* level of mystical union harbours within, God's rather special and tender care over the endurance capacity of our complexly frail nature (noted in the Old Testament

²⁶*Adversus Haereses*, V, 16, 1; 36, 3..

²⁷The Council Fathers stated our faith on the matter, without explaining how this is so.

²⁸The hidden giver of this saving power is the Holy Spirit: he whom the Church calls "the light of consciences" penetrates and fills "the depths of the human heart" (*Dominum et Vivificantem*, 45).

statement that no one could see God and live): When God shares His absolute love with us, He so forcefully takes us that our nature is not able to resist any longer in this earthly existence. The transfigurative purification, for example, is characterized by completely emptying the soul of the ego, what St John of the Cross called “the nothings”. Sanctifying grace upgrades our natural limit, giving us the capacity of resistance to cross the threshold of “the nothings” and enter deeper into our own spirit, and to grow — still during our earthly existence — in our dialogical relationship with the Divine Persons.

Across that threshold I had been afraid to cross, things suddenly seemed so very simple. There was but a single vision, God, who was all in all; there was but one will that directed all things, God’s will. I had only to see it, to discern it in every circumstance in which I found myself, and let myself be ruled by it. God is in all things, sustains all things, directs all things. To discern this in every situation and circumstance, to see His will in all things, was to accept each circumstance and situation and let oneself be borne along in perfect confidence and trust. Nothing could separate me from Him, because He was in all things. No danger could threaten me, no fear could shake me, except the fear of losing sight of Him.²⁹

The highest level of mystical union is expressed by the Catholic mystics as personal dialogue with the three Divine Persons, an anointing of impressions of the three Divine Persons, distinct among themselves, yet indivisible in one Divinity. This is unique, as potential, to the Catholic lifestyle, which if we were to live it to its full stature, would bring us to fulfil Jesus’ only New Commandment: To love with His Love.

Now, why is it that the sincere personal encounter with God on the *deificans* level can receive greater response from Him? And oftentimes, baptized Catholics, who have the potential, do not look for Him? As St John of the Cross explains, the reason why so few baptized persons reach this transverberative level of mystical union is not to be found in the Divine Will, but in the failing human response: we think of ourselves and stop trying.³⁰

²⁹Walter J. Ciszek, SJ, *He Leadeth Me*, GardenCity, NewYork: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1973, 79. Arrested in Poland (1941) for being a Catholic priest, he spent 23 years incarcerated in the Soviet Union, 15 of them in a Siberian gulag, and 5 in solitary confinement.

³⁰St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Divine Love*, No. 27. “And here it ought to be pointed out why so few reach this high state of perfect union with God. It should be known that the reason is not that God wishes only a few of these spirits to be so elevated; he would rather want all to be perfect, but he finds few vessels that will endure so lofty and sublime a work... As a result he proceeds no further in purifying

4. Conclusion

Nostra Aetate marks the pace for interreligious communities in dialogue:

The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons, that through *dialogue and collaboration* with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.³¹

By elevating Teresian mysticism to science, Fernando Rielo leads us to understand *how* interreligious dialogue can forge very fertile breakthroughs by sharing personal experience about one's "Interior Castle," "Dark Night," or "Living Flame of Love." There are several implications (both theoretical and practical) for the theology of dialogue based on our personal experience. I humbly mention only a few: further research into saints' experience in relation to mystical anthropology, whereby the "knowing" and the "living" are united. In our conversations, to further prioritize deeper sharing about our real experience of God in "sacred spaces" of encounter; thus answering the need for "spiritual companionship" throughout our journey of grace (both *deificans* and *transverberans*) in our earthly life.³² Even among Catholics, this refreshing "spiritual guidance" based on the Gospel spirit and sacramental life would bring us to be vibrant ascetical-mystical communities able to witness deeper love in our societies. With our other-baptized brothers and sisters, and with our non-baptized brothers and sisters, our encounters would be veritable ecumenical communities, referring to the great ideals of their Sacred Texts and Observances. This is living holiness together.³³

them and raising them from the dust of the earth through the toil of mortification. They are in need of greater constancy and fortitude than they showed."

³¹NA, 2.

³²St John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, Stanza 3, no. 29ff.

³³Fernando Rielo expounds its relation to Christ's promissory counsel: "When two or more are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst" (Mt 18:29).