



## Article

# *Kenotic and Trinitarian Theology in Interreligious Dialogue*

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**O**f all the moments of Pope Francis's first visit to the United States last year, the one in which I felt most proud as a sharer of the Catholic faith was in his representative participation in the interreligious memorial and prayer service at Ground Zero in New York City. The heartbreaking memory of the scourge of violence was somehow assuaged by the unspeakable beauty of this gathered humanity in all its diversity around a shared quest for peace. The distinctive religious dress of leaders across the spectrum of traditions cued the beholder to apprehend the religious diversity. Yet it was the harmonious lilt of the multi-ethnic children's choir that communicated the vision and imperative of working together for a future of unity and peace. *Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.* In that event, I glimpsed a humble pontiff Francis as representing (Catholic) Christianity as "one religion among many," for the life of the world.

The Catholic Church's progress toward inclusivity in interreligious theology and affairs in the fifty years since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has truly been of revolutionary proportion.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding such gains, Catholic theologian Peter Phan has asserted that most post-Conciliar theologies of religion are yet iterations of an essentially exclusivist fulfillment theory, i.e., of the understanding that other religions are ultimately fulfilled in Christianity.<sup>3</sup> This is *not* the case for the work of Jacques Dupuis, S.J.<sup>4</sup> Dupuis's theology of interreligious dialogue—based as it is on Trinitarian and Spirit-based Christology -- is here seen to underpin Phan's tracing of a *kenotic theology of religions* which is genuinely Christian but escapes the ambit of fulfillment theory.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will summarize Dupuis's articulation of the foundation theology. Next I will flesh out the contours of Phan's vision by showing how this kenotic way of being in relationship interreligiously has been heroically demonstrated in the lives of two communities of Catholic Christians, cultures apart: the Cistercian community of Our Lady of Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria, led by Dom Christian de Chergé, OCSO (d. 1996), and the pastoral teams of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, led by Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia (d. 2011.)

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2 Gerald O'Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2013). See especially Chapter 7, "Putting it Together," *passim*.

3 Peter C. Phan, "Reading *Nostra Aetate* in Reverse: A Different Way of Looking at the Relationships Among Religions," *Horizonte* 13, no. 40 (1830).

4 Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 2002, *passim*.

5 Phan, *Reading NA in Reverse*, 1838-1839.

## Backdrop: Vatican II and Post-Conciliar Theologies of Religions

With the worldwide bishops' ratification of the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on the Church's Relations to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*) the Roman Catholic Church overturned the age-old stance "outside the (Roman Catholic) church there is no salvation."<sup>6</sup> That is, the Church recognized that not only were other Christians—"separated brothers and sisters"—already united with Catholics in the one Body of Christ through baptism,<sup>7</sup> but that other religions shone with "rays of truth that enlighten all people,"<sup>8</sup> respectively. This overturning has for fifty years opened doors throughout the world, notably in terms of official theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the range of leaders of Christian denominations and religious traditions. Legions of grassroots efforts in ecumenical and interreligious ways are of monumental import as well, including practices of common living, collaboration for the common good, theological exchange, and spiritual sharing.<sup>9</sup> In this writing the focus will be on interreligious efforts, though there are recognizable overlaps within Christianity in the broad quest for reconciliation and unity.

Jacques Dupuis, S.J.—arguably the leading Catholic theologian of religion<sup>10</sup>-- describes four theological foundations of both interreligious dialogue and interreligious prayer.<sup>11</sup> The first two are documented with Vatican II, and the others are elaborated in post-Conciliar teaching. The first and second revolve around creation and redemption as iterated in *NA*, namely that God created but one human community "to people the entire earth" who, secondly, share one common redemptive destiny in the one God, whose providence, goodness, and saving design extend to the whole of humanity through salvation in Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* goes deeper and wider in asserting that all humans are made in the image of God,<sup>13</sup> and have the same human dignity and universal rights.<sup>14</sup>

Dupuis describes the third element of the foundation as the universally present and active Spirit of God in the religious lives of "others." Though *GS* had pointed in this direction by claiming the Spirit's universal activity in human peace, brotherhood, work, and progress,<sup>15</sup> it was only gradually after Vatican II that the Holy Spirit was named as inspiring the very "elements of truth and grace" in religious traditions *per se*.<sup>16</sup> The first two elements taken together were named by Pope John Paul II as a "radical, basic and decisive ...mystery of unity" which unites all humans. Though human differences pale in comparison to the value of this radical unity, the differences "must be surmounted in progress toward the realization of the great design of unity guiding creation."<sup>17</sup> In adding the Holy Spirit's action to this mystery of unity, the Pope asserted, "We may think that any authentic prayer is aroused by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every human being."<sup>18</sup>

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6 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 203-206.

7 *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 22.

8 *Nostra Aetate*, 2. The Council fathers had already broken from past identification of the Catholic Church with the very "Mystery of God" when they held in *Lumen Gentium* 8 that while "This church...subsists in the Catholic Church," they recognized a participation of religious "others" in this Mystery.

9 Phan, "Reading *NA* in Reverse," 1832.

10 Peter Phan of Catholic University of America refers to Dupuis as such in his assessment of *Christianity and the Religions* on the back of the book cover.

11 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 222-228; 239-242.

12 *NA*, 1. The Council has already elaborated this theme in weightier documents, notably *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 1-2, 5, 8; *Lumen Gentium* 1, 8, 16,

17. O'Collins makes the case that this point becomes a *leitmotif* throughout *Gaudium et Spes* (See *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, Chapter 6.)

13 *GS* 12.

14 *GS* 26.

15 e.g., *GS* 26.

16 *Ad Gentes* 9.

17 John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* 3, 5.

18 John Paul II, *RH* 11.

Dupuis's fourth element of the theological foundation of interreligious dialogue and prayer is that of the universally shared and present Reign of God. Dupuis demonstrates that Vatican II's theology of religions actually retained an identification of the Roman Catholic Church with the Reign of God established *in history* by Jesus Christ, while accepting that the Reign of God as an *eschatological* reality will continue developing until it reaches its fullness at the end of time.<sup>19</sup> But with Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* in 1990, the post-Conciliar theology of the central Magisterium advances that even the *historical* Reign of God extends beyond the Church in the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the world among other religionists and within their religious traditions per se. John Paul II wrote:

The Kingdom's nature...is one of communion among all human beings—with one another and with God...Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness.<sup>20</sup>

With respect to theological foundations for interreligious prayer, Dupuis names a fifth element, namely, that the religions of the world are *God's gifts* to the peoples. Simply put, since God—the One who seeks out and finds all persons—is the originating source of every element of “truth and grace,” so too is God the source and animator of the religious traditions themselves.<sup>21</sup> What God has given in a multiplicity of religious traditions is for our mutual enrichment. Indeed, since the Mystery of God cannot be exhausted by any one human tradition, the religions share a mutual complementarity in the elements of “truth and grace.”<sup>22</sup> Dupuis shows convincingly that a model of Trinitarian and Spirit-based Christology can be constitutive of salvation in Jesus Christ without adverting to an exclusivist fulfillment theory that would dispossess God-inspired elements of other religious traditions.<sup>23</sup>

Dupuis's articulation of Catholic theological foundations for interreligious dialogue and prayer relies on Conciliar and post-Conciliar teaching. It is the basis for advancing theological reflections such as those of Peter Phan, who advocates that from here the Church move toward a kenotic theology of the relations among religions.

### **Kenotic Theology of Relations Showing Up in Chiapas and Tibhirine**

Phan argues that sound foundations of a Catholic theology of interreligious dialogue have been established that ready the Church to evacuate the normative center, which, in Phan's view, would constitute a “reversal” of *NA*. It is a good start, he writes, to dispense with the patronizing naming as “non-Christian” our fellow humans who are equally religious “others.”<sup>24</sup> Phan's guiding approach is to follow the *kenosis*, the self-emptying of Jesus Christ proclaimed in what was probably a “pre-composed” poetic text,<sup>25</sup> which the Apostle Paul placed in his letter to the Philippians.<sup>26</sup>

Carolyn Osiek's biblical theology opens up Phan's recommended approach, and illuminates the ways I find this

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19 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, Chapter 8, “The Reign of God, The Church and the Religions,” especially 198, *passim*. Dupuis writes that “Vatican II of course adopted this by now indispensable distinction” especially in *LG* 3, 5, and 9.

20 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 15.

21 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 242.

22 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 256-257. Dupuis concludes that this mutual complementarity between Christianity and other religions is asymmetrical, insofar as “the additional and autonomous elements of truth and grace in the other traditions do not cancel the unsurpassable transcendence of God's revelation and self-communication in the person and work of Jesus Christ.” 257

23 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 255-257.

24 Phan, “Reading *NA* in Reverse,” 1826, 1828.

25 Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 56.

26 Phan, “Reading *NA* in Reverse,” 1835.

kenotic theology of the relations among religions lived out in Don Samuel Ruiz and Dom Christian de Chergé. Osiek writes that no New Testament text except possibly the Johannine Prologue rivals Phil 2:5-11 as to the amount of scholarly ink spilt in its elucidation.<sup>27</sup> Notably, the verb of emptying in v. 7, *ekenōsen*, is modified by the intensive reflexive, *heauton*, himself, which makes the sense of Christ's emptying to be active, i.e., this was a humbling that he made by his own choice.<sup>28</sup> Osiek shows that it was unlikely that Paul was espousing this text as preexistent Christology, but rather as a model for disciples of obedience to human limitations or mortality, even to death. Osiek writes:

Because Christ took on voluntary humbling, God exalted him. The first shall be last, the last shall be first. Those who lose their life will find it. We are here at the heart of the Christian Passover mystery, from suffering to triumph, from death to life. This is the Christianized form of the dynamic that inspires the oppressed in every generation. In the Hebrew Scriptures, it is God who watches out for the interests of the poor and oppressed and brings them redress. With the addition of Christology, Jesus becomes the prototype of how that happens, and the slave becomes the prototype of the Christian. If Christ could become a slave, then the slave could image Christ. In the humiliation of Christ is the exaltation of the oppressed.<sup>29</sup>

A consensus is claimed for this line of interpretation: Paul urged disciples to transcend themselves by taking on Christ's mutually loving attitude of humility and servanthood, to open themselves to authentic conversion of heart.<sup>30</sup>

Phan outlines his kenotic theology of the relations among religions by analogically applying three important elements of contemporary (post-Conciliar) Jewish-Christian dialogue. These practices are kenotic especially from the Christian side, namely 1) rejecting supercessionism, 2) overcoming "teaching of contempt" in earlier cultural-religious history, and 3) adopting a Christology that is Trinitarian. I elaborate each of these three elements in turn below by looking into the lives of two Christian communities of the late twentieth century, whose leaders and members kept striving to live fully as "Vatican II Christians," opening their hearts to conversion to Christ's humble attitude of loving mutuality and to finding the goodness and beauty in the "other" religious traditions of their neighbors. Notably, both communities struggled in cultural contexts of poverty, violence, and oppression.

### **Consciousness of Primary Covenant Relationships Defeat Supercessionism**

*Nostra Aetate* affirmed that God does not revoke the choices or covenant gifts that God has bestowed.<sup>31</sup> This claim harks back to the second-century church father Irenaeus, who taught that the first three of the four biblical covenants made by God with humans through Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Jesus were not abolished by the fourth. That is, the "new" covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ is new in the sense of "most recent;" the "older" testaments are more ancient, and even primary, but certainly not old in the sense of "former."<sup>32</sup> Both Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia of Chiapas, Mexico, and Dom Christian de Chergé of Tibhirine, Algeria, lived lives in their respective contexts that modeled their understanding that religious "others" and their traditions bore the selfsame dignity as did those of Catholic Christians, insofar as the One Living God was present and active in their lives and traditions.

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27 Osiek, *Philippians*, 55.

28 Osiek, *Philippians*, 61.

29 Osiek, *Philippians*, 67. Osiek notes that the traditional interpretation of the hymn to represent very early belief in the preexistence of Christ is more in harmony with the fully developed Christology of the fourth and fifth centuries.

30 Donald Senior, "Kenosis," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 584.

31 *NA*, 4.

32 Irenaeus, cited in Phan, "Reading NA in Reverse," 1837.

In the course of his forty years as bishop, Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia reflected on his own conversion to fully embracing the people of his diocese as true *subjects* of their own destinies, that is to say, as truly *human* subjects.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, he grew to full acceptance of the Spirit-filled authenticity of the *religious* traditions of the Indigenous peoples in his pastoral care in the Diocese of San Cristóbal, Chiapas. These two movements surely constitute Don Samuel's embrace of the prior claim of the Divine covenants with Adam and with Noah vis-à-vis the human subjects and religious traditions of the Indigenous, respectively. That is to say, Don Samuel came to understand that Vatican II's teaching was tantamount to Divine warrant to honor and preserve traditions of Mayan religious practice within and beside Catholic Christianity.

Samuel Ruiz Garcia was the first bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas to be consecrated in the Cathedral (1960) since the diocese had been created in 1539. But Ruiz didn't begin with the open-eyed consciousness of the diocesan patron, sixteenth-century defender of the Indigenous Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas.<sup>34</sup> First-born of devout mestizo parents of humble means, his mother would later confide that she and his father had given Samuel to God before his birth.<sup>35</sup> Samuel's academic brilliance had brought him an anything-but-humble Western theological education: after junior seminary in Mexico he studied philosophy, languages, and theology at Rome's Gregorian University, and continued for three years of Scripture studies in Rome and Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> Thirty-five-year-old Bishop Ruiz of Chiapas became the pastor of a minority Spanish-speaking mestizo people of the Pacific lowland region, and a majority poor Indigenous people of the Chiapan highlands who spoke many Mayan languages.<sup>37</sup> Don Samuel's kenotic conversion began early on:

The new bishop made a decision...that was ultimately to change both him and his diocese radically. He set out on a mule to visit every town and village in the vast expanse over which he held jurisdiction...What most impressed and shocked the bishop, as his mule carried him on tracks too narrow and rocky for a wheeled vehicle...was the poverty and abandonment in which the indigenous lived. It was something for which his previous experience had not prepared him. But it was something, he quickly concluded, that was essentially opposed to God's will for all humans.<sup>38</sup>

On that first road trip through the diocese, young Bishop Ruiz followed the old custom of staying with the local landowning bosses along the way. He would learn that his ancient predecessor Bartolomé had required his friars to stay in the huts with the Indigenous poor, and forbade that they give absolution to those who commanded slave labor.<sup>39</sup> Don Samuel would look back on that first journey with "incisive self-criticism":

I was like a fish that sleeps with its eyes open. I traveled through villages where bosses were scourging debt-slaves who did not want to work more than eight hours a day, and all I saw were old churches and old women praying. 'Such good people,' I said to myself, not noticing that these good people were victims of cruel oppression.<sup>40</sup>

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33 Michel Andraos, ed. and trans., *Seeking Freedom: Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Conversation with Jorge S. Santiago on Time and History, Prophecy, Faith and Politics, and Peace* (Toronto: Toronto Council of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, 1999), 20-21.

34 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 1.

35 Gary MacEoin, *The People's Church: Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Mexico and Why He Matters* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 20-21.

36 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 21, 28.

37 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 22; Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 1. "The composition of the Indigenous people of Chiapas includes: Tzotziles, Tzeltals, Lacondones, Tojolabales, Cakchiqueles, Zoques, Cho'les and Mames."

38 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 21-22.

39 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 26-27.

40 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 26.

Thereafter, Don Samuel stayed with the poor in their shacks, and set about learning the Mayan languages of Tzeltal and Tzotzil as preliminary to understanding the Indigenous peoples' mindsets.<sup>41</sup>

From 1962-1965, Bishop Ruiz attended all sessions of the Second Vatican Council, and later said that the Council effected the most important changes in the way that he and his teams "and the whole continent, even...the whole world" did pastoral work:

(The Second Vatican Council) was a theologically educational event for us and a profound experience of transition. We learned at the Council what it means to build and become a Church...We witnessed a very clear transition from a Church which announced a message as if given to it to apply to history, to a Church that is looking through history to illuminate its message and see how the word of God becomes visible through historic events.<sup>42</sup>

Dom Samuel's post-Conciliar work included his active role at the General Conference of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Medellín in 1968—appointed its president of Missions in 1970—and serving six years as president of the Mexican Bishops Commission for the Indigenous beginning in 1969. Ruiz scholar Michel Andraos summarized Don Samuel's integration of the teachings of Vatican II:

According to Bishop Ruiz, there are not two parallel histories in the world, one sacred and one profane. He learned from his work with indigenous communities that God's work is revealed in the history of all peoples and that God's Spirit is present in all cultures—the Spirit was at work in the world before Christ.<sup>43</sup>

This understanding of Don Samuel's—of the Divine presence in the religious "other" as subject—was soon reflected in the way that he and his pastoral team responded to an invitation to collaborate with state and academic entities to convene a first-ever conference of the Indigenous peoples.<sup>44</sup> As Bishop Ruiz recalled it, the process began by inviting the people—by now well organized and networked—to consider the proposition: "How does it appeal to you to participate in a reflection on your life situation today and what should be done to improve it in the context of a celebration of the life and work of Bartolomé de Las Casas?"<sup>45</sup> The people responded with enthusiasm, with a thousand communities of the Diocese representing 400,000 people prepared for what became the First Indigenous Congress in 1974.<sup>46</sup> Bishop Ruiz recounted the import of that Congress vis-à-vis four issues fundamental to the real-life problems of the Indigenous communities: education, marketing of their products, land distribution, and health care. Ruiz wrote of how the Congress led his team to a revised "down to earth pastoral plan (which)...eventually led us to the long journey of working tenaciously in support of the emergence of the autochthonous churches in the diocese."<sup>47</sup>

As the Bishop's friend and co-worker Jorge Santiago wrote of him, "It was during this time span that the alert conscience of Don Samuel was formed and became like the sure steps of the people he accompanied."<sup>48</sup> The

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41 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 27, 28.

42 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 9-10.

43 Samuel Ruiz and Javier Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," *Estudios Indígenas*, 2/1 (1972): 35- ; cited in Michel Andraos, "The Church and Indigenous Cultures: Beyond the Violent Encounter with Modernity," in *Theology and the Crisis of Engagement: Essays on the Relationship of Theology and the Social Sciences in Honor of Lee Cormie*, ed. Jeff Nowers and Nestor Medina (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 133.

44 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 33-34.

45 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 12.

46 MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 34.

47 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 12-13.

48 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 3.



kenotic postures of respectful listening instead of pronouncing, dialoguing instead of dictating, accompanying instead of walking ahead, were taken up wholeheartedly by this bishop, his pastoral team, and his people.

#### *Covenanting Community in Tibhirine, Algeria: Defeating Supercessionism*

Long before he was elected abbot of Notre Dame d'Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria, Christian de Chergé knew deep down that he was bound by the ancient Abrahamic Covenant to his brothers and sisters of Islam. Christian grew up in French-occupied wartime Algeria. His devout French Catholic mother had exerted her influence on his vocation more deeply<sup>49</sup> than had his French military general father, who raged that his son's monastic vocation in Algeria was a waste of his life.<sup>50</sup> In what would become Christian's posthumous last witness to the world, he had attested as much: "I have said enough, I believe, about all of the good things I have received (in Algeria,) finding so often the meaning of the Gospels, running like some gold thread through my life, and which began first at my mother's knee, my very first church, here in Algeria, where I learned respect for the Muslims."<sup>51</sup>

As a young man, Christian had opted to fulfill his military duty during seminary years. In the summer of 1959 he was a French lieutenant in Tiaret, Algeria, where he found "everything intoxicating, especially the native Berbers and Arabs, who were uncommonly hospitable by European standards, and uncommonly devoted to prayer and pleasing God."<sup>52</sup> Christian and the village policeman, Mohammed, became fast friends, drawn together by "their common love of God."<sup>53</sup> One fateful day Mohammed laid down his very life to save Christian's. Mohammed's self-sacrifice of love sealed Christian's own kenotic vocation in a Trappist-Cistercian community situated among the poor rural Muslims of Tibhirine, Algeria.<sup>54</sup> For Christian, living the Benedictine Rule in "strict observance" of obedience, stability, and conversion of manners, with humility as a first-order value, was necessarily set in Muslim context. On the day following his solemn profession in 1976, he presented his Trappist brothers with a long, written credo of his faith. This excerpt alludes to the Abrahamic covenantal bond and "shared praxis" with Muslims:

The prayer of the monk and that of the Muslim have a common spiritual parentage which must be more celebrated...Certain values of Islam are undeniably a stimulus for the monk in communal prayer, fasting, submission to the will of God, giving alms to the poor, offering hospitality, self-transformation, trust in divine Providence and spiritual pilgrimage...in all this can be recognized the Holy Spirit. No one knows from where it comes or where it goes.<sup>55</sup>

Christian had truly grown in Vatican II's openness, notably in the teachings that the Holy Spirit had acted in "other" religionists. God had been walking in covenant with humanity since humanity was created. Indeed, Christian's zeal for living this understanding would deepen his "double belonging" to Christianity and Islam.

#### **Mutual Religious Enrichment Overcomes "Teaching of Contempt"**

Previous eras have witnessed Christian teachers' vilification of other religionists from an apologetic, defensive stance. Such "teaching of contempt" included the pre-Conciliar portrayal of the Judaism at the time of Jesus as "a legalistic and ritualistic religion without a soul," and of Asian religious practices as "rank superstition, witch-

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49 John Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith, Love, and Terror in Algeria* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 23. "She had always told him there was no higher life than one of prayer, and no greater vocation than to be a monk."

50 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 22-25, 49.

51 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 245.

52 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 7.

53 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 8-9.

54 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 9-10.

55 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 47-48.

craft, idolatry, immorality, and works of the devil.”<sup>56</sup> Happily, the Church’s more respectful approach to the religious “other” with an expectation of discovering “elements of truth and grace” has opened Catholic Christians to a more mutually appreciative embrace of religious people’s search for God.

*Mutual Religious Enrichment in Chiapas, Mexico: Overcoming “Teaching of Contempt”*

In sixteenth-century Chiapas, Bartolomé de Las Casas was virtually a lone voice in decrying the maltreatment of the Indigenous by the Spanish colonizers, who worked hand in glove with the Catholic missionaries. The Catholic norm of the day was to disparage the Mayan traditions as bereft of the Divine and as tantamount to idolatry.<sup>57</sup>

Preparations for the post-Conciliar (1968) Medellín conference of Latin American bishops—which would yield the mandate of the preferential option for the poor—included a convocation of pastoral workers in Colombia to reflect on how the Gospel was being incarnated in Indigenous cultures. Soon after, some of the CELAM bishops also convened with Indigenous and professionals in Mexico. Despite the post-Conciliar raised consciousness of Bishop Ruiz and his brother bishops with respect to the dignity of the Indigenous people and their religious traditions, Mexican anthropologists were not yet ready to let the Catholic Church “off the hook” for centuries of contributing to the destruction of Indigenous culture. The anthropologists allowed the Catholic hierarchy into the discussion on the condition that they “sit on the bench of the accused.”<sup>58</sup> “This was the price to pay for that invitation, but we accepted,” Bishop Ruiz recollected. The bishops’ very acceptance of being complicit with the colonizing oppressor was in itself an aspect of the kenotic dynamic of their ongoing conversion.

In the wake of the First Indigenous Congress (1974), Bishop Ruiz and his pastoral team were opened to the depths to which the injustices of the past had become hardened systemically in cultural, sociological, governmental, and even ecclesial structures. As the Indigenous people’s consciousness as subjects of their own history took hold, their corporate resistance was directed to the injustices perpetrated by the dominant model, “the world of the white and mestizo people,” with the ugly consequence of repression.<sup>59</sup> The legacy of the Spanish colonization of Mexico had run a terrible gamut of social injustice for the Indigenous people of Chiapas, especially in their struggle to regain their rightful land. Asserting their claims against the forces of self-interested State and landowners, the just petitioners have been unjustly imprisoned, raped, assassinated, disappeared, and subjected to all manner of threat to their safety and livelihood.<sup>60</sup> A culmination point of the resistance was January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) initiated a major standoff with the Mexican Army and government, with the manifesto “Today We Say Enough is Enough!” The story of Don Samuel’s mediation of the conflict in the following years is sure testament of his own place of deep trust among the people of Chiapas, known by then by the endearment “*Tatik*” (“father,” “teacher,” “elder.”) Yet Don Samuel was concurrently persecuted by the State and powerful landowners, and his efforts were undermined and misinterpreted by some within the hierarchy of the Church.<sup>61</sup> The burden and torment of the people’s suffering was wholly shared by their pastor and his pastoral team.

Yet this long-suffering pastoral team had long since been collaborating in “mutual enrichment” with the people, chipping away at the structural injustices of both the Church and civil society, dignifying the Indigenous traditions and thwarting the racial discrimination. Within the Church, teams worked to translate the Christian scriptures

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56 Phan, “Reading NA in Reverse,” 1837-1838.

57 Class presentations and exhibits at Museo Itatik Samuel in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by Jorge Santiago Santiago, Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez, and María Isabel Fernando, January 23, 2016.

58 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 16.

59 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 3.

60 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 3-4. On December 22, 1997, forty-five parishioners of the village of Acteal were massacred with impunity by what looked to be State-complicit terrorism.

61 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, vi, 4-6. For a more complete telling of these events, see MacEoin, *The People’s Church*, Chapter 1, *passim*.



into the Mayan languages, and the liturgy too was adapted to the vernacular. Readings from the Mayan language scriptures were incorporated into the liturgy (e.g., the Tzeltal *Popol Vuh*), along with traditional Mayan music, processions, and ritual movement. Perhaps most notable of all was the inclusion of the Mayan altar and the prayer of the four directions—not only in the Mass, but also at various ecclesial gatherings. The ritual composition of the Mayan altar represents an integral expression of Indigenous cosmology, theological anthropology, and spirituality. The unity of Madré Tierra with the Creator God and humans among all creatures is represented in the “divine and human journey of life in which God ‘germinates’ in our hearts, and we take on the face of God (*divinization*) as we walk our journey.”<sup>62</sup>

Hundreds of catechists, deacons, and their wives were trained to serve together in their locales throughout the diocese. Remarkably, Bishop Ruiz and his team realized the need to adapt the method of “calling” the deacons to the Indigenous peoples’ own ways of recognizing elders for service. This adaptation itself is a remarkable example of the kenotic, listening praxis engendered with Don Samuel’s leadership.<sup>63</sup>

Further, Bishop Ruiz helped to initiate organizations more loosely affiliated with the diocese, which drew on the Indigenous people’s deep resonance for acting *communally*. To resist the colonial legacy of cultural patriarchy, the Diocesan Coordination of Women Center (CODIMUJ) was birthed to build women’s sense of dignity for the sake of transforming family life, communities, church, and civil society. Women were invited together and encouraged to read the word of God with “the eyes, mind and heart of a woman,” to pursue some education for themselves and their daughters and sons, and to resist any semblance of domestic violence.<sup>64</sup>

The Institute for Intercultural Studies and Research (INESIN) was also founded under the watch of Bishop Ruiz. INESIN resists the modern exploitative culture by inviting the Indigenous people to reclaim Indian theology in their stories, myths, and *buen vivir* (life-giving approaches to life.) INESIN’s very process is key to its mission: richly engaging the lived experience and thinking of the Indigenous people, helping them to articulate it and share it back to the community to deepen the ongoing thinking. Education of the young people in *buen vivir* has become a particular priority for INESIN.<sup>65</sup>

In 1989, Bishop Ruiz founded “Frayba,” the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Center, to counter the repression of human rights spawned by political and economic power brokers. Frayba’s holistic vision is to preserve the Indigenous culture that respects the Earth and sees the risk to humanity in the dominant economic system. Collaborating with the United Nations in documenting human rights abuses, Frayba aims to “help communities build their own processes of defense.”<sup>66</sup>

Once Don Samuel and his pastoral team recognized the vestiges of the colonial “teaching of contempt” as rooting the structural injustices in church and civil society, they worked tirelessly to uproot them and to replant seeds of justice and hope. Jorge Santiago wrote that Don Samuel’s “yearning for solidarity knows no limits,” as shown in his great openness to dialogue, collaboration, and capacity to approach others.<sup>67</sup> He belonged to the people and they belonged to him.

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62 Class presentation in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez and María Isabel Fernando, January 23, 2016.

63 Class presentation in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez and María Isabel Fernando, January 23, 2016.

64 Site visit and class presentation in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by María del Carmen Martínez Aneiros, O.P., and staff of CODIMUJ, January 27, 2016.

65 Site visit and class presentation in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez and María Isabel Fernando, O.P., and staff of INESIN, January 29, 2016.

66 Site visit and class presentation in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, by Pedro Faro and staff of Frayba, January 29, 2016.

67 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 6.

A verse in the Koran spoke Christian's language. *God is the light of the heaven and the earth...It is lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western. Its very oil would shine forth though no fire touched it. Light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will...His light is found in temples which God has sanctioned to be built in remembrance of His name. In them, morning and evening, His praise is sung by men whom neither trade nor profit can divert from remembering Him.* Christian liked that. He wanted to use local oil in the monastic lamps.<sup>68</sup>

Dom Christian's enthusiasm for Islam had been kindled as a child, but was fanned into flame as a young professed monk, when he was sent to Rome for two years to study Arabic, the Qu'ran, and Islam under a great scholar of these, Fr. Maurice Borrmans.<sup>69</sup> Borrmans understood that the energy and arc of Vatican II "set the stage for Christian, with its greater emphasis on ecumenicism (sic)...respecting differences and accepting diversity without proselytizing."<sup>70</sup> Christian studied the writings of Algeria's pagan, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim spiritual figures. He entitled an essay *Algeria Before God*, and issued a caveat: "There is no religious history of Algeria in the modern Western sense, which carves the sacred out of daily life and gives it a compartment of its own, alongside political, economic, art, and social history."<sup>71</sup> Christian was to attest that "(Algeria and Islam) are body and soul,"<sup>72</sup> and he took warrant from Vatican II's teaching to wrest their beauty from the clutches of any in Western or Christian quarters who would desacralize Islam with teaching of contempt.

"Contempt," wrote French author and playwright Jules Roy, "was the essence of the colonial mentality, which ultimately led to Algeria's war for independence. In 1961 his *La Guerre en Algerie...* revealed the European attitudes that made reconciliation impossible. "Arabs are a filthy breed, good for nothing...Occasionally one turns out to be honest before fanaticism takes over...The Arab God could have nothing in common with the Christian one...Who was that other God the tattered bastards invoked?...Arabs never suffered from swamp fever...their happiness was that of cattle."<sup>73</sup>

Bishop Léon-Etienne Duval—named Archbishop of Algiers in 1954—was a key predecessor of Christian de Chergé in fighting the Western teaching of contempt of Islam. As a Catholic bishop Duval understood himself to be bishop for *all* the people living in Algeria. "Muslims and Jews know that our Christianity requires us to love them, too," he wrote. "To love God means to love all his children as brothers (sic), Muslims and Jews know that when we don't follow these demands we betray our ideal as Christians."<sup>74</sup> For such defense of the dignity of Islam, Duval was derided by opponents as "Mohammed"; even his French priests rejected his calls for equanimity, as "many of his own clergy had been baptized in the rivers of colonial prejudice and Algérie Francaise."<sup>75</sup> When in 1962 the Trappist abbot general almost closed the monastery in Tibhirine, it was Bishop Duval's strong intercession that saved it, citing as he did the Qu'ran's high regard for monks and their relentless prayer life.

Thus, the monastery at Tibhirine was still there when Christian arrived in 1971. As a young monk in Tibhirine, one superior allowed him to exercise his "special calling" to share the light of Islam with his Trappist brothers. Despite some grumbling from "the choir," Christian presented weekly on a topic from an Islamic point of view (e.g., the Virgin Mary, prayer, death) by way of helping his community to deepen their lived conversion to lov-

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68 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 40.

69 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 40-41.

70 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 41.

71 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 41.

72 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 245

73 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 15.

74 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 14.

75 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 15.

ing their Muslim siblings “as Christ.”<sup>76</sup> Christian also helped to organize and convene a *ribat-es-salaam* (“bond of peace”): a semiannual gathering of Muslims and Christians across the region who desired to gather to learn, discuss, and grow closer in relationship with one another and their interreligious communities.<sup>77</sup> These efforts were thwarted for a time by a subsequent abbot’s caving to the bellyaching of some conservative monks,<sup>78</sup> but yet Christian tended the flame of his zeal for extending the deep brotherhood of his Cistercian community to the Muslim villagers of Tibhirine. By the time the brothers elected Christian as their abbot (1984), they understood that this “*l’homme des relations*” would lead by modeling humble service and loving mutuality, both within the cloister and by preferential option with the Muslim poor of Tibhirine.

Dom Christian served as abbot during some of the most frightful terror of Algeria’s history, when Algeria’s independence from France left a vacuum for warring factions to fill.<sup>79</sup> He and the brothers tried to remain nonpartisan throughout. They referred to the men of the Algerian army as “the brothers of the plains” and the rebel jihadists as “the brothers of the mountains,” but still they lived with the same omnipresent anxiety as their village neighbors, as violence exploded randomly from all sides and throughout Algeria.

In the midst of some of the worst of the terrorism in September of 1993, Christian was invited to address the worldwide convocation of 170 women and men superiors of the Cistercian order in Poyo, Spain. He was assigned to speak of his understanding of the Cistercian contemplative identity. Christian began by saying that he didn’t much like that phrase, as it

...implies that contemplation yields something stable, an identity. But to my way of thinking, contemplation is either a form of continual searching or it is nothing at all. Here on this earth, it is a journey, a tension, a permanent exodus, the invitation to Abraham, “Come follow me.” (Our abbot general Brother Bernardo told us): “You are here (in Tibhirine) so your Cistercian way of life can be enriched by what you gain from the local culture.”...We are learning that the trust shown, and the faithfulness demanded by our neighbors is God’s gift to us—something to contemplate and which may inspire new forms of communion.<sup>80</sup>

Christian continued by relaying and interpreting the Algerian bishops’ recent pastoral letter. He offered their concluding rhetoric to the effect that Christian monks should become “experts in Islam.” After all, the monk’s vow of radical obedience is made in the manner of Jesus Christ’s self-emptying submission to the Father—making Jesus “the only true Muslim” in the bishops’ view.<sup>81</sup>

Unsure as to his audience’s reception of all this talk of convergence of the Christian contemplative vocation with that of Islam, Christian held back a detail of his sensitivity to the Muslim “others” who might visit his community’s chapel. Christian had designed and commissioned a new crucifix to place in the Trappist chapel, one that might not offend Muslim sensibilities. This action was the fruit of a conversation he had had with a Sufi who was scandalized by Christians’ depiction of a humiliated Son of God on the cross, since the Quranic text about Jesus’s death emphasized his being vindicated by God. The image of Jesus on the new cross was captioned in Arabic “He is risen,” and was clothed in a purple tunic—not scandalously humiliated in nakedness—without a crown of thorns and without a suffering countenance.<sup>82</sup>

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76 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 49-50.

77 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 52.

78 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 54-55.

79 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, *passim*. See especially *Part Two: A Shared Torment: 1988-1994*, 85-186.

80 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 131-132.

81 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 134.

82 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 135-136.

I take from this account the tremendous conversion that was ongoing for Christian de Chergé. One senses here that Christian had acted not only to prevent a scandal that a Muslim might experience were s(he) to encounter the original crucifix in the Trappist chapel. He replaced it for the sake of the Muslim *in himself and in his brother monks* who might otherwise be offended, or at least might remain ignorant of the offense that could possibly be given. Christian understood the power of art, of the sacramental, to incarnate conversion. All of this evidences that Christian's heart had claimed a kind of double belonging to both Christianity and to Islam.

### **Trinitarian Christology and Theology of Religion Contextualizes the Role of Christ and Church**

Irenaeus understood that God—the First Person of the Trinity—works out one plan of salvation from God's "two hands," namely, God's Logos and Pneuma. This teaching is retrieved for our times of interreligious commitment. "The role of Christ as unique and universal savior can no longer be interpreted apart from the equally unique and universal role of the Spirit...(Both) function salvifically in history not as parallel agents...but before, after, with and outside each other."<sup>83</sup> The *Christ, the anointed one*, the Logos of Creator God—actively present with the Spirit in other religions—makes these "ways of salvation" together with Christianity.

#### *Trinitarian Re-contextualization in Chiapas, Mexico*

Even in the early 1970s Bishop Ruiz proclaimed that the church must see in "other" religions— the Indigenous— a divine element and a presence of God (AG 9b, 11b), and, more so, to know that the Word of God, before he became flesh in order to save and gather up all things in himself, was already in the world, as the "true light that enlightens every man" (Jn 1,9 and GS, 57.)<sup>84</sup> Don Samuel's grasp of this Trinitarian insight magnified over the course of the forty years as bishop through which he "emptied himself" for the sake of his sisters and brothers of Chiapas. Ruiz credited the Holy Spirit for bestowing on him the grace of conversion through his Indigenous "siblings," and for granting him the grace of perseverance in accompanying the deepening of the *people's church*. Thus has true systemic change transpired in the Church of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas.

Andraos writes of "the transformation of the old cultural relations...taking place at many levels" in the Diocese of Chiapas, with an accent on two of those: the autochthonous church and Indian theology. *Iglesia autóctona* describes "the ecclesial communities that have a distinct indigenous cultural character and organizational structure for pastoral service and leadership... 'a church that is rooted in the place where it is located, that realizes itself and develops assuming the local culture.'" It is *not* a church that comes from outside, that belongs to another culture. *Teología india*, as explained by Indigenous theologian Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez, is "the set of religious experiences and knowledge that we Indian peoples possess and with which we explain our experience of faith, our harmonious [relationships] with others and with all of the cosmos...Our theologies seek to strengthen our heart so that we as peoples do not shrivel away under the power of the system of death."<sup>85</sup> These movements would not have progressed but for the communal commitment of the people of the Church of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas, working together in the image of a communal God of Love, and the kenotic life gift of Don Samuel Ruiz, "a spring of hope for a peace with justice and dignity which never stops flowing."<sup>86</sup>

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83 Phan, "Reading NA in Reverse," 1839.

84 Samuel Ruiz, "Le Monde d'Aujourd'hui Interpelle la Théologie," in Samuel Ruiz et Edgard Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne, Libérer l'Homme* (Québec: Edition Départ, Entraide Missionnaire, 1971), 24. Cited in Andraos, "The Church and Indigenous Cultures," 133.

85 Pedro Gutiérrez Jiménez, "Flowers and Fruits of Our Maya-Christian Spirituality and Theology," paper presented at the Latin American Congress on Religion and Ethnicity, INESIN, January 11, 2005. Cited in Andraos, "The Church and Indigenous Cultures," 137-138.

86 Andraos, *Seeking Freedom*, 6.

On Christmas Eve 1993, the Trappist brothers were paid an unwelcome visit from their “brothers of the mountains.” Their violent exploits were often directed against unwanted Westerners, including the massacre of some Croatian workers who had become friends of the monastery.<sup>87</sup> The jihadists left the monks unscathed that Christmas night, except for leaving them with a foreboding fear of an eventual return. This night opened the brothers to an ongoing process of discernment about what they were to do: stay or go? As abbot, Christian’s wisdom position was that each monk must decide for himself whether God was calling him to stay in Tibhirine and face the possibility of a violent death, or to move to a safer place, even to return to the Motherhouse in France.<sup>88</sup> The brothers were very much aware during this discernment that their decision had life-or-death impact on their Muslim neighbors as well; that is, if the brothers left the monastery, the jihadists might well overrun Tibhirine.

This is where Christian’s reflection in Poyo, Spain, came to bear on the lives of all. How will the Holy Spirit help each man *empty himself* for the sake of God in Christ, who he has come to know as incarnated in the dear Muslim neighbor? How will each interpret his vows of poverty, obedience, stability, and conversion of manners in this crucible of discernment? Each brother was faithful to the process of prayerful listening in his own heart, in the Word whispered through liturgy as well as his brothers and sisters of the cloister and neighborhood. With remarkable freedom each brother discerned that his choice was to stay.

Christian gave a Lenten retreat in 1996 which focused on the “five pillars” to be practiced daily in order to live in peace. *Patience*. “Inside the monastic enclosure,” Christian quoted the Rule of Benedict, “persevering in their calling until death, monks participate through their patience in the sufferings of Christ.”<sup>89</sup> *Poverty. Presence. Prayer. Forgiveness*. These are five communal practices made possible by the brothers’ living in the “Community of the Trinity.”

In the wee hours of the Wednesday before Palm Sunday, “the brothers of the mountains” kidnapped seven of the monks—including Christian—and held them hostage until beheading them on May 21. Knowing that such a day might come, Christian had written a letter which he had sent to the care of his brother Gérard in France, with the instruction that it was to be published only after Christian’s death. Christian’s letter reflects (as much as excerpts can) what I understand to be a kenotic Trinitarian theology of religions, based on a radical understanding of the equal dignity of all persons and religions. It heartens with the hope of the Community of God of the eschaton:

If the day comes, and it could be today, that I am a victim of the terrorism that seems to be engulfing all foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church, and my family to remember that I have dedicated my life to God and Algeria...

My life is not worth more than any other—not less, not more. Nor am I an innocent child. I have lived long enough to know that I, too, am an accomplice of the evil that seems to prevail in the world around, even that which might lash out blindly at me...

Obviously my death will justify the opinion of all those who dismissed me as naïve or idealistic: “Let him tell us what he thinks now.” But such people should know my death will satisfy my most burning curiosity. At last, I will be able—if God pleases—to see the children of Islam as He sees them, illumi-

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<sup>87</sup> Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, See Chapter 12, “Father Christmas,” 145-155.

<sup>88</sup> While Kiser narrates this ongoing individual/communal discernment to an extent in Chapters 13-16, I think that it is more powerfully portrayed in the film *Of Gods and Men* (Sony Pictures Classics: Armada Films), 2010.

<sup>89</sup> Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 218.

nated in the glory of Christ, sharing in the gift of God's Passion and of the Spirit, whose secret joy will always be to bring forth our common humanity amidst our differences...

And to you, too, my friend of the last moment, who will not know what you are doing. Yes, for you, too, I wish this thank-you, this "A-Dieu," whose image is in you also, that we may meet in heaven, like happy thieves, if it pleases God, our common Father. Amen! Insha Allah!<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

What is to be the Catholic warrant, impetus, and disposition in approaching the religious "other"? Self-righteous ideology and self-defensive posturing would return us to the scene of 9/11, to the next rounds of "teachings of contempt." No. We need instead to contemplate the heart of our faith, the Mystery of God in Christ through the Spirit. All of humanity is part of one mystery of creation and redemption. The one Spirit of God is universally present and active in all peoples of Earth, inspiring the very "elements of truth and grace" in all religious traditions, and is alive in every person's heart. A "radical, basic and decisive ...*mystery of unity*" thus binds all humans to one another. The Reign of God is at hand: a communion of all who promote God's activity in human history and transform it unto liberation. Consider Jesus, whose kenotic self-gift is God's own way of salvific love.

Here I looked to two practical theologians who led their communities to drink deeply from the wellsprings of Trinitarian theology: Dom Christian de Chergé of Tibhirine, Algeria, and Don Samuel Ruiz Garcia of San Cristóbal de Las Casas of Chiapas, Mexico. Both were living exemplars of a kenotic dialogic praxis. Both might well recognize their warrant, impetus, and disposition in this writing of Franciscan theologian Ilia Delio:

...all that God is, is given in love. God is hidden in the appearance of being (that is, the Father is hidden in the Word) and made visible by the energy (Spirit) of love. The self-emptying of divine love into the other is the fullness of love in the other; God "appears" in the other. God is not a superior being who lords it over us; rather God stands "under" us, hidden within ordinary reality as the "real," the whole of the whole, the depth of love...The self-emptying of God into the other is the fullness of God in the other. This mystery of emptiness and fullness undergirds the humility of God. Divine power is not a force over us but the humility of love beneath us (cf. Phil 2:6-8), the love that makes existence possible.<sup>91</sup>

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90 Kiser, *The Monks of Tibhirine*, 221ff; full text of Christian's letter, 244-246.

91 Ilia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 80.